# Buddhist Arts of Thailand

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# Certificate

This is to certify that Miss. Charuwan Chareonla of Thailand, a candidate for Master of Arts Degree in the Department of Ancient Indian & Asian Studies, Magadh University, session 1979-81, has worked and completed her dissertation entitled " **MAIN ASPECTS OF BUDDHIST ARTS IN THAILAND** " under my supervision and guidance and the contents of dissertation has been completed through her own study so far as the best of my knowledge is concerned.

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# Main aspect of
# Buddhist Arts of Thailand

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# Preface

I am very pleased to present my thesis-work, for which I have collected and selected items from various important sources. Greatly contributing to my success in producing this work has been the kind cooperation of many well-respected and highly-regarded persons.

I would first like to mention Dr. Upendra Thakur, Professor & Head of the Department of Ancient Indian & Asian Studies, Magadh University, who kindly allowed me to take up this thesis. His scholarship — which has resulted in a great knowledge which he shares with all of his students — was of invaluable assistance to me on many occasions during my studies here in India, and I am most grateful for his kindness.

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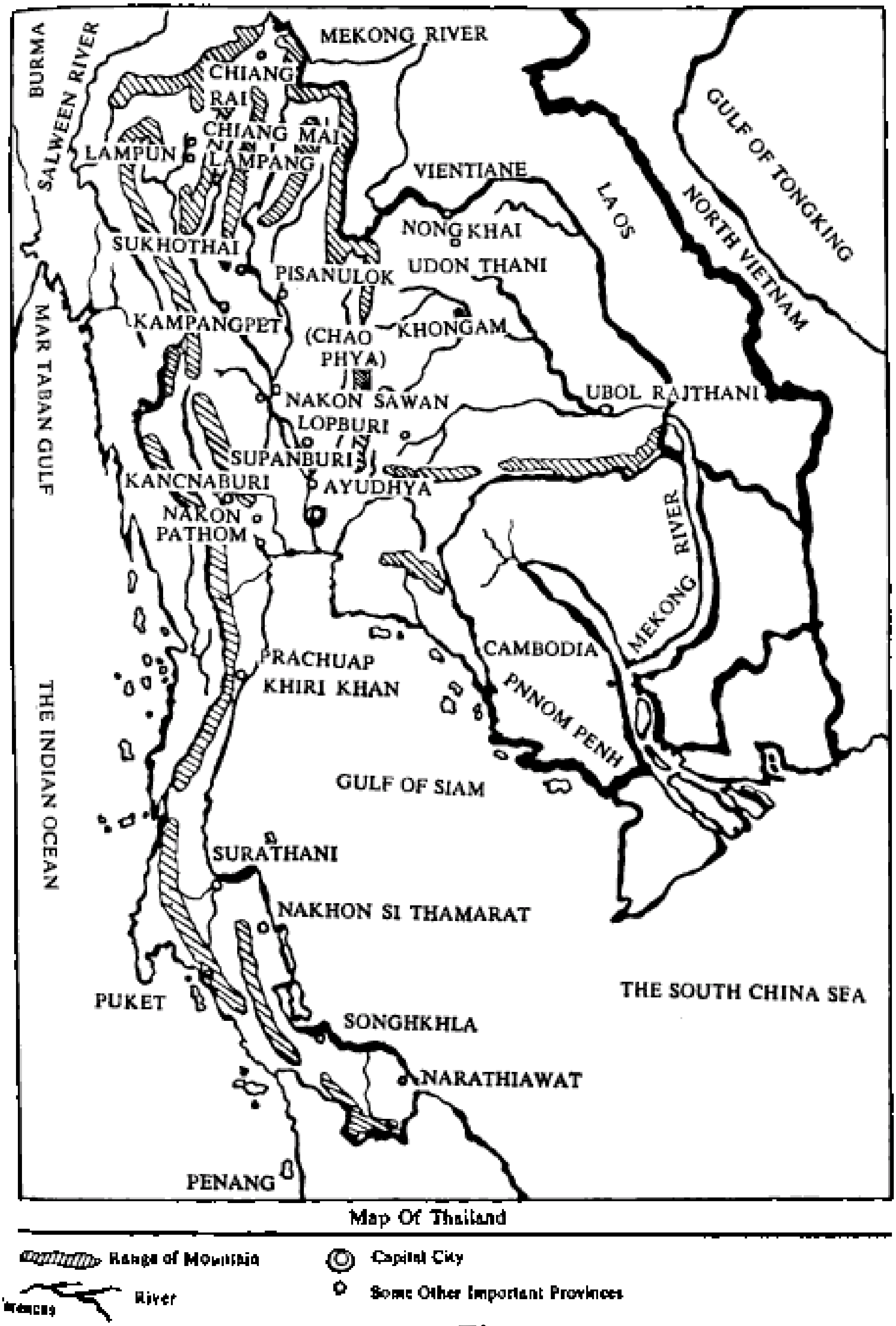

BURMA
SALWEEN RIVER
MEKONG RIVER
CHIANG RAI
CHIANG MAI
LAMPUN
LAMPANG
VIENTIANE
NONG KHAI
UDON THANI
LA OS
GULF OF TONGKING
NORTH VIETNAM
SUKHOTHAI
PISANULOK
KAMPANGPET
(CHAO PHYA)
KHONGAM
MAR TABAN GULF
NAKON SAWAN
LOPBURI
UBOL RAJTHANI
SUPANBURI
KANCNABURI
AYUDHYA
NAKON PATHOM
MEKONG RIVER
PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN
CAMBODIA
PNNOM PENH
THE INDIAN OCEAN
GULF OF SIAM
SURATHANI
NAKHON SI THAMARAT
THE SOUTH CHINA SEA
PUKET
SONGHKHLA
NARATHIAWAT
PENANG
Map Of Thailand
Range of Mountain
Capital City
River
Some Other Important Provinces
Map of Thailand

Fig. 2

# Chapter I

## Introduction

### Thailand — Its Location and People

Siam or Thailand is one of the South-East Asian countries, which is situated right in the middle of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. To the north of Thailand are China and Laos, the latter being adjacent to the north-east frontier. It is separated from Thailand by two sections of the Mekong River. On the west and north-west, it is bounded by Burma and on the east by Cambodia and Vietnam. On the south-east it is surrounded by Cambodia, while on the south its border goes deep into the Malay peninsula between the China Sea and the Bay of Bengal touching Malaysia.

The total area of Thailand is roughly 5,13,090 square kilometres, and the land area approximately 2,00,000 square kilometres. The country also has extensive coastlines on the Gulf of Siam and Strait of Malacca. The general outline of Thailand resembles in shape an ancient axe, but some people think that her shape is just like the head of the symbolic white elephant (Fig. 2).

## The People of Thailand

Thailand is divided into 72 provinces. The present population of Thailand is over 45 million. About one-

half of the population live in the Central Plain and Bangkok, the Capital seat of the country, which is the point of convergence for all the country's railroads. Indeed, as the economic locus, cultural and social centre, political seat and hub for administration, Bangkok completely dominates the life of the people in Thailand. The other 71 cities are basically provincial towns.

The people of Thailand are called Thai, the great majority (over 80 percent) of them belonging to the Thai race, which forms the same ethnic group as the Laotians of Laos. To the North-East of this country and the Shan territory of Upper Burma, there are also certain Thai minor tribes scattered here and there over a large area of Southern China, Tangking of North Vietnam and in Assam, the easternmost province of India.

Ethnologically and anthropologically the Thais are primarily of Mongoloid stock. Their ethnological and physical features are of medium stature, slight build, having an olive (somewhat between yellow and brown) skin complexion and black hair. When the Thais came down from Southern China in order to settle down in the area (modern Thailand) they intermixed freely with their several forerunners, the Mon-Khmer linguistic groups — Mon of Lower Burma, the Khmer of Cambodia, the Indonesian linguistic groups, the Malay and the Chams, the latter surviving in certain parts of South Vietnam and Cambodia. But the Thais mainly intermixed with the Chinese with

whom they had close contact since the earliest phase of history.

In our time also we can see the minority ethnic groups of people in Thailand comprising more than 15 million Chinese, 7,00,000 Malays, and also the hill tribes, who live in the mountains of the North. The Malays in the south inhabit particularly the provinces near the Malaysian border. The Chinese are to be found in Bangkok and other provincial towns and are usually engaged in commerce or skilled trades.[1]

## The Language of the People

The Thai language as spoken in Thailand forms a subdivision of the linguistic group known as the Thai language. This language has words in its original form of a monosyllabic type not unlike that of the Chinese language. Each word is independent and complete by itself and admits no modifications as do the inflectional languages. The arrangement of words in a sentence reveals a unity with that of most of the languages of South-East Asia. Thai words, as spoken in Thailand, have features of words of Pali and Sanskrit, originally from India. This, of course, is due to the contact of cultures between the two regions.

Thus in a way the language of the Thais belongs to the type of language technically called in philology an

1. Jermsawatdi, Promsak, Thai Art with Indian Influence, p. 3.

Insolating Language. Each word is free to enter into the construction of sentences, and does not require, in a sense, any grammar. The Thai alphabet is of Indian origin. It was instituted on the Sanskrit lanuage, yet it bears the Khmer or Cambodian influence.

## The Religion of Thailand

Buddhism is the state religion of this country. This religion spread from India to Thailand long before the beginning of Christian Era. The two important schools of Buddhism —the Hinayana (Theravada) and the Mahayana sects have flourished in this country from the earliest period till the present day.

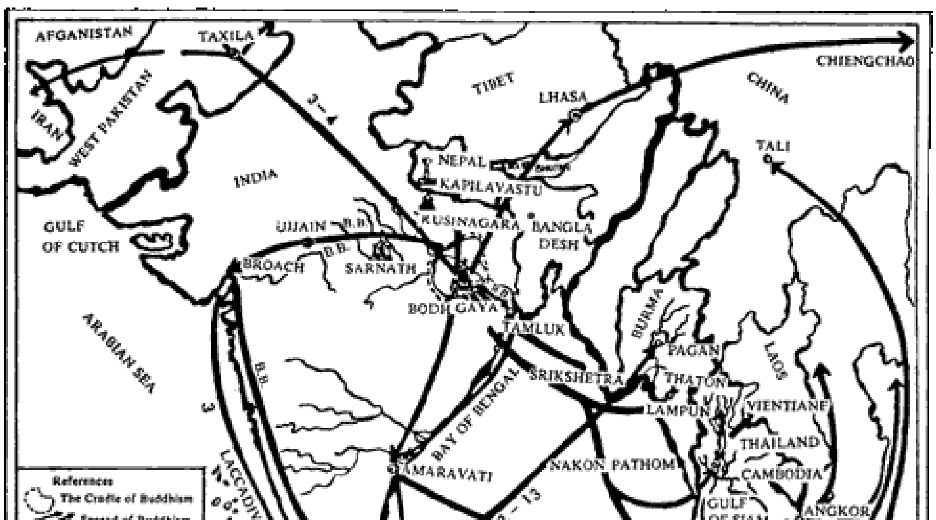
Thailand is one of the greatest, most important Buddhist centres of the world. Slightly more than 90 percent of the Thai population are Buddhists. Since ancient times the Thais have subscribed to the Hinayana or Theravada sect of Buddhism, which teaches that salvation can be earned only through individual efforts. This sect of Buddhism became the major creed and religious faith of the Thai people.

Other religions in this country are the religions from China — Taoism and Confucianism. But the people in south are the followers of Islam, while the hill-tribesmen are animists, believing in the spirits of nature or ancestors. Brahmanism (Hinduism) as well as Christianity also survive in the country.

## Culture and Art

The Culture of Thailand has two important sources of origin — indigenous and foreign. The indigenous source comes directly from the ideas and inspiration of the people while the foreign sources came through its cultural contact with other great civilized nations such as India and China.

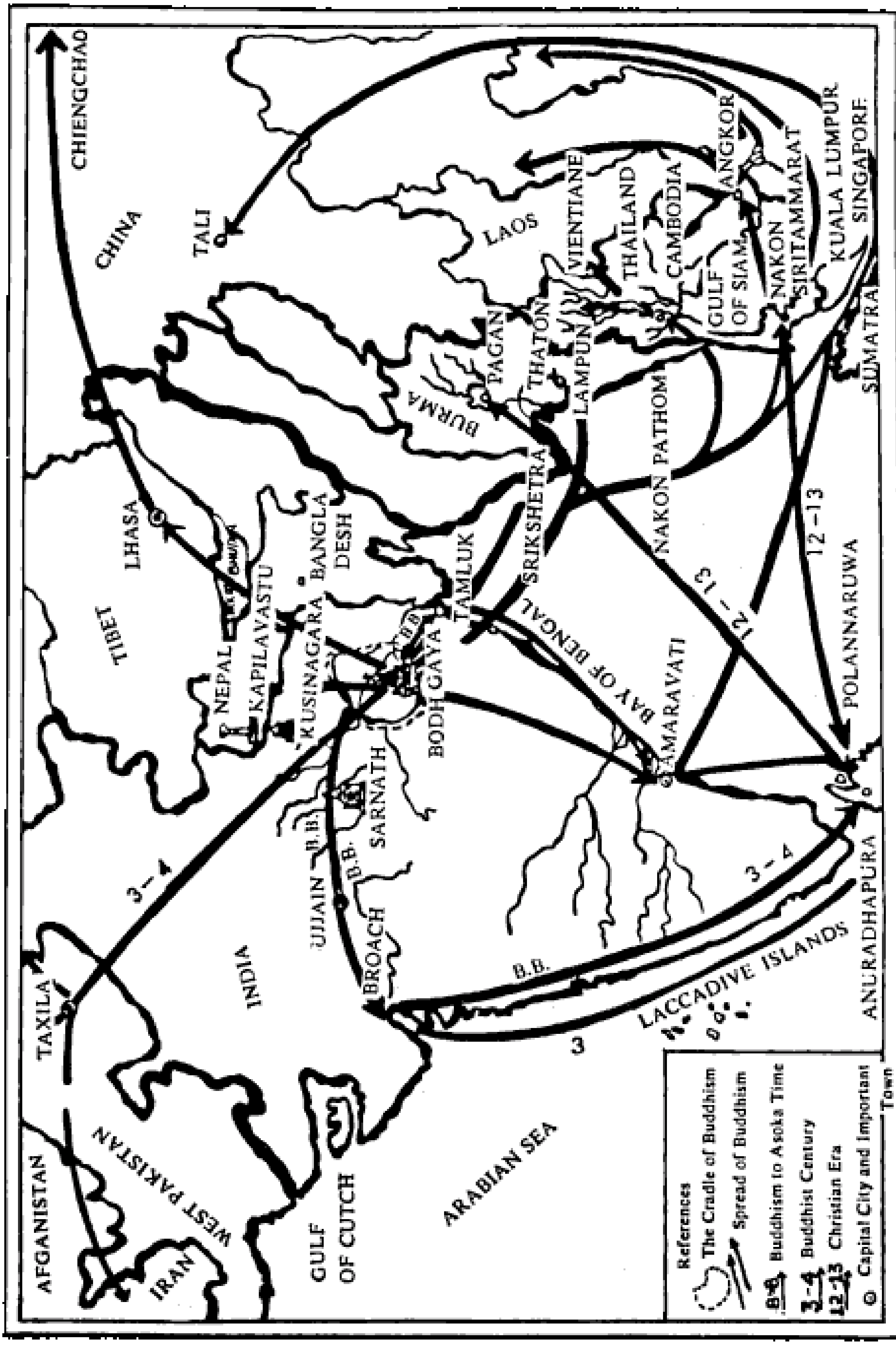
The customs, traditions, ceremonials and festivals of Thailand are derived from those sources. In the field of art, it mainly deals with religions such as Buddhism and the cultural and artistic relationship with India, and other countries. The Thais are lovers and observers of nature, amiable, mirthful and generous to everyone with whom they come into contact, due to their natural and pleasant surroundings. Thai art served religion, which formed the national ideal and conception of life.[2]




Map of Asia : Showing the Spread and Progress of Buddhism from The Buddha's Time to The Present Day (6th Century B.C. — 20th Century A.D.)

**Fig. 0**

2. Jermsawatdi, Promsak, Thai Art with Indian Influences, p. 6.




Map of Asia : Showing the Spread and Progress of Buddhism from The Buddha's Time to The Present Day (6th Century B.C. — 20th Century A.D.

**Fig. 1**

# Chapter II

## The Development of Buddhism in Thailand

### The Introduction and The Development of Buddhism in Thailand

Thailand is one of the few countries where Buddhism still flourishes and exists as a living force. Historians and archaeologists hold divergent views regarding the exact period when Buddhism is said to have reached Siam. Some scholars believe that Buddhism was introduced in Thailand before the Christian Era during the reign of Emperor Asoka, who is credited with having sent Buddhist missionaries to various parts of the world (Fig. 0 & 1). This is proved by archaeological finds at Pong Tuk and Phra Pathom. Remains of a large number of Buddhist structures, the images of the Buddha, inscribed terracottas and definite symbols of Buddhism like the Dharmachakra, belonging to the first or second century A.D., have been found in these places.[3]

It is most probable that Siam was the first country where the Indians landed by sea-route before proceeding to the neighbouring countries. There is every likelihood that the traders who went by sea first landed at the South of Thailand. While some of them settled

3. Bapat, P. V., 2500 years of Buddhism, p. 79.

down there, others might have proceeded to Cambodia and Annam in the East and Malay Peninsula in the South. Thus, they were able to estaulish their colonies in the vast region of South-East Asia.[4]

Regarding the religious movement in this part of the world, it may be suggested that the Indians who came to Thailand and her neighbouring countries, brought the Buddhist faith and spread it in these countries. That Buddhism reached Thailand can be supported on the basis of archaeological evidence and literary and foreign accounts as well as other historical records and traditional beliefs which tend to suggest that this religion was introduced into Thailand at four different stages as following:

1. Early Theravada Buddhism (Hinayana sect or Southern Buddhism) in the 3rd century B.C.

2. Mahayana Buddhism (Northern sect) in the 7th century A.D.

3. Pukam (Pagan) Theravada Buddhism in the 11th century A.D.

4. Lanka (Lankavamsa or Lankavong) Theravada Buddhism in the 13th century A.D.

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4. Majumdar, R. C., The Indo-Siam Culture (India and Thailand) Quarterley, Vol.2, No.l, July, 1953, p. 103.

## The role and development of Buddhism in Thai Monarchies

Lankavong Theravada Buddhism has officially occupied the highest position as the national religion in the history of Thailand. The development of Lankavong Buddhism in Thailand began at quite an early date in this country. The Lankavong monks preferred to reside in the forest hermitages built by the king himself. They used the Pali (Magadhan script) language in performing their religious ceremonies, which were different from that of the Sukhodayan monks, as the latter used the Sanskrit language for the same purpose. These differences kept Lankavong monks aloof from the local monks. They did not stay with local Sukhodayan monks in the same monastery nor did they perform Sanghakamma and other religious ceremonies with them.[5]

This was the first state of its development. Later on, unity was brought about among the two divisions of the Sangha. Lankavong and local Sukhodayan monks began to live in peace and harmony by the wise policy of King Ram Khamhaeng. After the unification of the Sangha, they were divided into two sections called Arannavasi and Gamavasi. The Arannavasi represented those who were mainly devoted

5. Department of Fine Arts: King Ram Khamhaeng and the Lankavong Buddhism, Silpakon Journal, p. 72.

to Vipassanadhura or meditation and who lived in forest hermitages, while the Gamavasis were mainly devoted to Ganthadhura or the study and teaching of the scriptures, and who lived in towns and villages.[6]

King Ram Khamhaeng, for the sake of promoting Buddhism in his kingdom, extended the royal patronage to the Buddhist Sangha by adopting several measures for better organisation and administration of the Order.

One important designation of monks at this time was "the senior-most monk", who possessed the highest qualifications in matters of discipline and knowledge of Dhamma. He was honoured by the king with the title of Sangharaja or Patriarch. He was the head of Buddhist Sangha in the kingdom. This was the first major development of Buddhism in Thailand since it came to stay in this country long before the 3rd century B.C.

The next phase of development of the Lankavong sect of Buddhism in Sukhothai kingdom is to be seen in the reign of King Mahadhammaraja Lithai (1347–1376 A.D.), who was the grandson of King Ram Khamhaeng. The two sections of the monks —Arannavasi

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6. Arannavasi is the Thai word meaning "anyone who lives in the forest hermitages" — Arana forest and Vasi — householder.
   Also Gamvasi means the layman, Gama derived from Sanskrit language meaning village. Vasi — householder. (Rahula, W., A History of Buddhism in Ceylon, p. 197).

and Gamavasi — had improved their administration to the best of their capacity. Also this king was the first Thai monarch, who left the throne temporarily and entered the monastic life of a Buddhist monk.

This noble example was followed by the Siamese kings of the Ayudhya and Bangkok periods. Since then it has become customary for the Thai Youths to accept monkhood for at least a short time (of four months; vasa) in their lives.[7] The achievement of King Lithai represents the beginning of Buddhist tradition and customs which were not seen before.

The Sukhothai kingdom reached the highest peak of political grandeur during the reing of King Ram Khamhaeng and religious glory during the reign of King Lithai. But after their death, the successors of these two great monarchs were too weak to protect the empire from the rulers of Ayudhya.

All the Ayudhya kings from U-Tong or Praja Tibodi I (who was the founder and first king of this kingdom) up to kings who ruled in the 14th century A.D. were the ardent followers of Lankavong Buddhism, during whose times several Buddhist monasteries were constructed, which gave great impetus to the spread and development, of Buddhism in Thailand.

During the period 1448–1488 A.D. the history records the glorious days of Lankavong Buddhism under the patronage of great King Boramatrailokant

7. Spinks, Charles Nelson, Thailand: Past and Present, p. 39.

or Trailok. During his reign of 40 years the development of this sect took place in several respects. King Trailok became a Buddhist monk for a period of eight months and was ordained at Wat Chulamani in Pisanalok, his capital and the administrative centre of his reign. It is recorded in Siamese Chronicles that some 2,388 men were also ordained on this great memorable occasion.

King Trailok was the first Siamese king who dedicated his own palace to the Buddhist Sangha. Moreover, he had constructed monasteries and viharas inside the area of his palace. One of the religious activities of this king was that he adorned the images of Bodhisattva's 500 incarnation in A.D. 1458. The production of these images represented his intense faith in Buddhism.

The important event of the Ayudhya period was the establishment of a new sect of Buddhism, named Vanaratnavong or the Pa-Kaeo[8] sect which differs from the original Lankavong. The introduction of the Pa-Kaeo sect took place in the reign of King Indraraja I, in 1422 A.D.

The reign of King Boromakot marks another turning point in the history of Buddhism in Thailand. King

8. Pa Kaeo sect is the name of the new sect of Theravada Buddhism, first originated in the Ayudhya period before the reign of King Baromatrailokanath. Pa-Kaeo is a Thai word meaning "the forest of glass"; Pa — forest, and Kaeo — glass.

Boromakot ruled over Ayudhya from 1732 A.D. and in his reign history repeated itself in reverse. It was at this time that Ceylon received the Buddhist faith and doctrine from Thailand, although it was the country from where Thailand had received Buddhism in earlier years.

The Ceylonese King, Kirtisiri (1747–1781) sent his delegation to Thailand to invite a group of monks in order to re-institute higher ordination (Upasampada) in Ceylon. King Boromakot of Ayudhya agreed to send a group of monks headed by Abbot Phra Upali Mahathera and Phra Ariyamuni Thera. They went with the royal envoy to Ceylon and helped in the reintroduction of the higher ordination and the reorganisation of the Buddhist Sangha in that island. The Siamese Buddhist missionaries were successful in their religious propagation.

A new capital city was constructed on the eastern bank of Menam (Chao Phya) river by King Rama I, the founder of Chakri Dynasty. This new capital of Thailand came to be known as Bangkok, which is still the capital city of Thailand.

In the days of King Rama Tibodi I, Lankavong Buddhism remained the national religion. The king himself had taken several important steps to promote this religion. First of all he financed, from his own private purse, a new and complete edition — written on palm-leaves — of the Buddhist Canon of the Tripitaka. It was

soon found that this Tripitaka edition had been made in a hurry from unreliable texts.

A most important event took place in this reign. It was the Ninth Buddhist Council, held at Wat Mahadhatu in Bangkok in 1788 A.D. under King Rama I's auspices. This council worked for five months. The magnitude of this Council may be judged by the latest edition of 1925–8, consisting of 45 volumes of an average of 500 octavo pages. The revision on this occasion resulted in what has come to be known as the Tripitaka Chabab Tongyai — The Great Gilt Edition[9] written on palm-leaves. It is still preserved and kept in the Library in the precincts of the Chapel Royal of the Emerald Buddha in the royal palace in Bangkok. This Council was officially regarded as the ninth of the Buddhist Councils held in all the Buddhist Countries of the world.

The most important event relating to the development of Buddhism in Thailand was the establishment of a new Nikaya or sect of Buddhist Sangha known as Dhammayuttika Nikaya. This new sect of Buddhism was founded by Prince Mongkut, who was a Buddhist monk for 27 years. The Dhammayuttika system was officially recognised and Prince Mongkut began to regularise its practice and to lay down a regular course

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9. Tripitaka Chabab Tongyai is the Thai word meaning "The Great Gilt Edition", Tripitaka-Edition or Buddhist doctrine, Chabab — Volume and Tongyai — great or big gilt.

of studies with its nucleus at his seat of Wat Bovo-ranives. He travelled widely in the country to spread his doctrine.

In the reign of King Rama IV (or Prince Mongkut, his original name), there were two sects or Nikayas of the Buddhist Order in Thailand. One was the Maha-nikaya or the original Lankavong Buddhism, and the other was the Dhammayuttika Nikaya. There are several different practices between the monks of the two schools. The Dhammayuttika monks did not receive money by hand and did not take milk in the evening. They also did not put on their shoes at the time of their entrance into their residence. Monks of both the schools also differed in the system of wearing the robes. But, in spite of these differences, they had developed the doctrine and practice to the best possible condition. Both of them flourish up to the present day.

In the reign of King Rama V great attention was paid to Buddhist education of the monks. He was the founder of the "Buddhist University" in Thailand known as Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, now housed in Wat Mahadhatu in Bangkok. This University provides higher education in Buddhism along with modern subjects. The other Buddhist University known today as Mahamakutrarajavidyalaya was also established during his reign. The latter was founded by King Rama V's brother. This University was built for the Dhammayuttika monks. Both Universities

were maintained through the royal patronage of King Rama V himself.[10]

Now, we come to the present King of Thailand, King Rama IX or King Bhumibol Adulyadej. He became a Buddhist monk in keeping with the noble practice of his predecessors. The important event in his reign was the august occasion of the Buddha Jayanti, the 2,500th Anniversary of the Buddha Mahaparinirvana. The Buddhist world celebrated this grand day and Thailand also commemorated this day with great celebration in Bangkok and also thoughout the country.[11]

Besides his patronage for the restoration and construction of Buddhist monuments in the country, the king also gave royal patronage to the prosperity and progressive working of the two Buddhist Universities which were established during the time of King Rama V. During his reign, Thailand sponsored the meeting of the Council of world Buddhist Association V in Bangkok. Delegates from Buddhist countries of the world participated in this council in large numbers. This was also one of the important events which marked the development of Buddhism — now the national religion of Thailand.

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10. Jermsawatdi, Promsak, Thai Art with Indian Influence, p. 39.
11. 2,500 years of the Buddhamahaparinibbana (the year of the Buddha's death) corresponding to 1957 A.D. according to the Thai Calendar.

# Chapter III

## The Introduction and Origin of Buddhist Art in Thailand

Thai traditional arts have numerous distinctive qualities which make them easily distingulishable from those of other neighhbouring countries in South-East Asia. Much of their inspiration and many of their features have been borrowed or adopted from other Asian sources, including the Indian, Mon-Khmer, Sinhalese, Chinese and other civilizations.

Thai art mainly deals with Buddhist religion and is known as Buddhist art, which formed the national ideal and conception of life. It is said that during the greater part of the kingdom's history, religious motifs predominated. Sculpture, metal casting, sacred architecture and the arts were employed for embellishing temples. They were for many centuries the principal modes of expression.

Just as the medievil artists of Europe gave outward form to their religious aspiration by building cathedrals and beautifying them with sculptures, woodcarvings and so forth; or by labouring to produce exquisitely illuminated manuscripts, so did the Thais express their devotion to the sacred doctrine of the Lord Buddha by sculpting or casting glorious images

and erecting magnificently adorned buildings in which to house them.

The Classical Thai Buddhist Art owes more to India than to any other country, but it seldom drew its inspiration directly from there. Indian art and craftsmanship are no doubt regarded as the prototypes of the Buddhist art in this country. The waves of adaptation and imitation from Indian sources swept the country since the first quarter of the beginning of the Christian Era. It is said that several schools of Indian art came in contact with Thai art at a very early period. Stylistic evidence shows the influence of the Amaravati school of Indian art on the Buddhist art in Thailand in the early centuries of the Christian Era. Later still, the Gupta, Paliava and Pala-Sena elements from India are noticeable in Thai art.

In the field of architecture, it received the modelled structure of the architectural art from the Peninsula South India, where the three great empires of the Chalukyas of Badami in the Deccan, the Pallavas of Kanchi on the coast, and the Pandyas of Madurai in the far south flourished.

In the field of sculpture and painting also, the Indian school of art played an important part in the Siamese Buddhist artistic workmanship. The images and idols along with the wall-paintings in Siam owe their origin and adaptation to different Indian schools of art such as the Gandhara, Mathura, Amaravati and

the Classical art of the Gupta period which were responsible for the introduction, origin and growth of Buddhist art in Thailand. Especially the Orissan art and architecture as well as art from Bengal in Eastern India are regarded as the main prototypes of art in Thailand and of other South-East Asian countries.

Thailand is the land of many human cultural activities and artistic workmanship. Several human races have settled down in this country since remote times, and all of them had their cultural and artistic elements, which contributed at lot to the Buddhist art in this country. The introduction and origin of Buddhist art in Thailand, no doubt, represents the close relationship with Indian art and most of these influences were adopted in the primitive art of the early powerful kingdom of Thailand called Dvaravati kingdom.

In the long duration of the Mon's Dvaravati kingdom in central Thailand, there was considerable artistic activity and movement in both architecture and sculpture, which is classified by scholars as the Davaravati school of art. It is regarded as the first and earliest Buddhist school of art in Thailand. From archaeological excavation and researches, a few objects belonging to this period have been found which consist of the Buddhu Images, bas-reliefs and Dhammachakra (Wheel-like symbols of the sacred doctrine of the Buddha). They reveal a strong Gupta influence and are probably of Indian workmanship.

Next to the Dvaravati period of the early Buddhist art of Thailand is Sri-Vijaya kingdom. This kingdom extended its sway over parts of present Indonesia, Cambodia and areas of South and Central Thailand. This kingdom reached its zenith around the eighth century A.D. The surviving examples of Sri-Vijaya art in Thailand strongly resemble the features of the splendid monuments of that period, which are found in Java and Sumatra island. They deal with Mahayana elements, as at that time the Mahayana sect of Buddhism flourished in some island countries of South-East Asia such as Java, Sumatra; the Malay Peninsula and Southern Thailand as well as in Cambodia. This school of art is called the Sri-Vijaya school of art, which is regarded as the next stage of growth of Buddhist art in Thailand, after the Dvaravati school of art, which bears strong elements of Hinayana Buddhist art.

The next stage of development can be seen in the art of the Lopburi period (11th–15th century A.D.). The area was occupied by the Khmers or Cambodians and as such the art of this period is known locally as Khmer art which deals with Mahayana elements, just like the Sri-Vijaya school of art. This school of Buddhist art marks the last stage of the growth of Buddhist art in Thailand before the rise of the Thai people to power in the land which is now called Thailand.

The school of art from this period onwards has been classified by the archaeologists and scholars as

Pure-Thai art, which consisted of different schools of art. The Pure-Thai art is classified into five artistic styles such as:

1. Chiengsaen
2. Sukhothai
3. U-Tong
4. Ayudhya
5. Bangkok styles respectively.

It would not be out of place to discuss here the transformation and intercourse of Indian art with the first three schools of art in Thailand. The question is how did the Indian art of different schools come in contact and later became the prototype of the early Buddhist art in Thailand?

As we know, when Indians migrated to the various countries of South-East Asia they brought with them Indian culture and artistic activity, and began to spread them in such regions in which they had settled. There were several waves of Indian immigration in South-East Asian countries, especially in Thailand.

The immigration of Indians in Thailand started long before the beginning of the Christian era. It was in the 2nd and 1st century B.C. that Emperor Asoka sent his Buddhist missionaries to propagate the new Doc-

trine of Theravada Hinayana Buddhism in Suvarnabhumi, with the result that the Indians started settling down in this country from that time onwards.

The second and third centuries A.D. represent the Golden Age of artistic immigration from India into Thailand and other South-East Asian countries. The Gupta school of art succeeded the Amaravati school in those regions. The opening of Takuapa-Chaiya[12] trans-peninsula route was responsible for this cultural fusion towards the end of the eighth century A.D. The culture of the Dvaravati kingdom is to be considered as a stylised form of this wave of Indian immigration to Thailand, which seems largely to penetrate via Burma and the Three Pagodas Pass route in western Thailand.[13]

The duration of the next wave of Indian settlers in Thailand was from the middle of the sixth to the middle of the eighth century A.D., corresponding to the dominance of the Pallavas in South India. This wave followed almost exclusively the trans-peninsula route from Takuapa to the Bay of Bandon, now in South Thailand. Later on, from the second half of the eighth century A.D. Thailand witnessed the Maha-

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12. Now these two locations are combined and are located within the Thai border. It lies in the South of Thailand, Chaiya, one of the districts of Surathani province of South Thailand.

13. Pandey, C. B.: India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture, Vivekananda Rock, Memorial Committee, p. 455.

yana wave which came to the Bay of Bandon by the same trans-peninsular route and it brought the influence of the Pala-Sena art of Bengal (India) into the South of Thailand.

Scholars suggest that the Indian settlers generally followed three routes for coming to Thailand. All these route may have been in use simultaneously or at different periods, and they were certainly used to bring into Siam many different styles of Indian art.

The first route was used by the earliest Indian immigrants, who came from the region of Amaravati at the mouth of the Krishna river of South India. They landed probably at the port of Martuban, South Burma, and then travelled southward through the Three Pagodas pass into south Central Thailand.

But in the days of the Gupta emperors at Magadha in India, the Indian missionaries as well as traders coming eastward used the ancient port of Tamralipti (Tamluk) on the Hooghly River for their journey starting point.[14] These emigrants also went to Martaban, unless they were bound for Akyab and Arakan on the west coast of Burma, since Thaton was the ancient seat of the Mon civilisation in Lower Burma, and Martaban was an equally useful port either for Thailand or for Burma also.

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14. Near modern Calcutta, Capital of west Bengal State, it stands much nearer the sea. (Le May, Reginald, A concise History of Buddhism in Siam).

In Pallava times, there was the southern route from Kanchi (Canjeevaram) in Tamil Nadu (India) which was the capital of the Palava kings. This route led either straight across to Mergui and Tenassarim or slightly southward to Takuapa and Puket Island (Junk Ceylon) in the South of Thailand. This route was also used by Indian missionaries and traders to reach Thailand.

Another route to consider there is the entire sea-route round the island of Singapore and up to the Gulf of Siam.[15] All these routes facilitated the journey of the Indian immigrants to settle in Thailand and spread their culture and religious art in Thailand.

**Fig. 25b**



15. Near modern Calcutta, Capital of West Bengal State, it stands much nearer the sea. (Le May, Reginald, A concise History of Buddhist Art in Siam.) Cf . Department of Fine Arts: Art in Thailand, Bangkok, 1955.

# Chapter IV

## The Pre-Thai Art

### Art of Dvaravati Period
### (6th or 7th–11th Century A.D.)

The earliest schools of Buddhist art in Thailand were, of course, pre-Thai schools. The most important of these early pre-Thai schools is known by the name of the Dvaravati School of Art.

From the architectural and sculptural remains that have been brought to light during the recent years, it can be said with some confidence that during the second half of the first millennium of the Christian Era, the dominating people inhabiting central Thailand were of the Mon race, who founded the mighty empire of Dvaravati. Under the leadership of a Mon aristocracy, this kingdom was at its height in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. and was finally extinguished in the late 10th century A.D.[16]

The name Dvaravati appears in the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims — Hiuen-T'sang and I'tsing as well as the text of other writers, which mention that

16. Boribal Buribhand, Luang Griswold, A. B.: The Royal Monasteries and Their Significance, Thailand Culture Series, No. 2, p. 6.

in the part of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, between Sriksetra, which is the ancient name for Burma (Prome) and Isanapura (Cambodia), there was the kingdom of To-lo-po-ti, a name which George Coedes has restored as Dvaravati. The Chinese name of this kingdom of To-lo-po-ti was surmised to be equivalent to the Sanskrit Dvaravati which later became part of the official name of two Thai capitals — Ayudhya and Bangkok.

Rev. E. J. Fitel restores the Chinese name of this kingdom to Dvara-pati — as the "Lord of the Gate".[17] Other authorities, however, suggested that it is the name of chief place of worship of Lord Vishnu in his Avatara of Krishna in the town of western India which is known today as Dwarka.[18]

But, archaeological evidence throws new light upon the name of this kingdom and recently two silver coins were unearthed at Nakon Pathom province in Central Thailand, bearing a Sanskrit inscription which might be translated as "the merit of the kings of Dvaravati." This evidence supports the older identification of To-lo-po-ti that this kingdom was located most likely in the Central part of modern Thailand.

From this evidence as well as the discovery of archaeological artifacts and monuments in Central

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17. Eitel, E. J. Rev: Chinese Buddhism, p. 18.

18. Thomas, E. J.: Life of Buddha, p. 126.

Thailand, it is clear that the kingdom called Dvaravati was situated between modern Burma and Cambodia. Of this kingdom all that can be said at present is that its predominate people were of the Mon race under the influence of Indian civilisation, and they practised the Buddhist faith and that their sculpture was based on Gupta models.

Many of the Theravada Buddhist objects and monuments, which have been attributed to the 7th century A.D., have been discovered in the central part of Thailand. This style of art is called "Dvaravati school of art". The exact location of the capital city of this kingdom is, however, still unknown. It might have been at the town of Nakon Pathom, at an ancient site at Ku-Bua, Ratburi Province or at U-Tong in Supanburi Province.[19]

It is said that the Dvaravati period is the later successor of Suvarnabhumi, because antiquities belonging to the Suvarnabhumi or Mauryan style of art have also been discovered in the previously mentioned locations in Thailand. Thus, the art of Suvarnabhumi or "Land of Gold" has its special relationship with this art of Dvaravati.

Dvaravati art flourished in the central part of Thailand, for instance, at Nakon Pathom, U-Tang in the province of Supanburi and Ratburi, and at Muang Fa

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19. Department of Fine Arts: Architecture in Dvaravati Period, p. 4.

Daed Sung Yang in Kalasin in the North. Some Dvaravati sculptures were also discovered in South Thailand, and early Buddha images in Cambodia also belong to the same style of early Dvaravati. In about the middle of the 7th century A.D. , the inhabitants of the town of Lavo (Lopburi) migrated to found another kingdom in the north, that is the kingdom of Haripunjaya. Thus, the Dvaravati school of art was carried by them to that kingdom also.

According to archaeological research and restoration the Buddhist monuments belonged to this school of art and represented the contemporary art of the Gupta temple architecture. Most of the monuments were in the form of open-air structures. From the artistic point of view, it can be said that the monuments of Dvaravati art represented the earliest Buddhist religious buildings in Thailand. Archaeologists have, however, discovered the pure Indian structure in origin, which fully supports Indian influence in the field of architecture in Thailand before the beginning of the 7th century A.D. Later Dvaravati religious buildings which were erected for commemoration of Theravada Hinayana Buddhism in Thailand consisted of different styles of architecture. The chief among the Buddhist building of this period is the stupa architecture of different styles. This stupa-structure of Dvaravati can be divided into four following categories:

1. The five-storeyed stupa or chedi with terrace in each storey. The basements of the stupa were decoratted with the frieze of stucco and burnt-clay illustrating the narrative story of Buddhist texts.

2. The stupa with a square base, has a central part in the form of an inverted alms-bowl and a final part divided into many superimposed, flat rings terminated by a bulb. This style of stupu might belong to art of Mahayana Buddhism.

3. The stupa with a square base, with the central part in a hemispheric shape and a pointed finial.

4. Stupa with square base and five terraces, the lowest being the biggest and the smallest terrace at the top. Each terrace has niches, three in number in each of the four directions. Inside these three niches standing Buddha Images are housed.

At Baripunjaya, now modern Lamphun, in North Thailand, one of the outstanding Dvaravati architectural buildings is the sanctuary at Wat Kukut in Lamphun, which has five successive terraces overlapping one another like the sanctuary Sat-Mahal-Praasada in Polonnaruva, Ceylon, both of which had adopted the Gupta style of architecture.[20]

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20. Department of Fine Arts: Op. Cit., p. 8.

The architecture of Dvaravati art in the North-Eastern part of Thailand consisted of religious buildings, which bear the strong influence of the temple architecture of the Gupta period as regards its plan of a square basement. In each corner of the basement there was a series of pillars, each pillar having the lotus-shape on the capital.

It is to be noticed here that in this period, the artists did not know the use of roof-supporters in the erection of buildings. So the roofs of architectural buildings in the Dvaravati period were modelled on the style of Indian architecture by the use of material overlapping each other in successive terraces. The materials used in this period are brick and lime, masonry and stucco. The subject matter directly came from the Gupta art of India by its outstanding feature of decorative stucco at the base of the religious building, lying in the form of a spiral flower.

But the most important and prominent monument of this period is the great stupa or chedi at Nakon Pathom province. The great temple called by the Thais as Phra Pattom Chedi, literally meaning the first sanctuary of this land. It consists of a vast circular Pra-Chedi or stupa with four viharas grouped round it and a terrace platform. The dome, of circular form, of this stupa has its shape like an inverted basin or cup. The base of this stupa, also square, has a circumambient gallery and enclosure outside (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3**

A replica of the Original Chedi of Phra Phathom at Nakon Pathom Province, Central Thailand

According to some authorities, this great stupa at Nakom Pathom had its original form erected by the Mon. With the passage of time, it was completely ruined. In 1860 A.D., King Mongkut or Rama IV of the Bangkok period decided to restore it in the form of Phra Chedi. He ordered four new Viharas to replace the old ones, as well as the present circular gallery which completely encloses the stupa. He also placed models of the original monuments in the enclosed grounds.

The entire work was not completed till the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn or Rama V, who covered the dome of Pra Chedi with the orange, glazed Chinese tiles which now add so much to its beauty. This great stupa or Pra Pathom Chedi is the greatest and most perfect example of religious buildings in the Dvaravati school of art in Thailand from remote times up to the present day.

Besides architecture, the real glory of the Dvaravati school of art is its fine and splendid sculpture as well as stucco decoration. Sculpture was already in production in the 6th or 7th century A.D. The style and artistic inspiration, as well as workmanship, were based on the examples of the art of Amaravati from South India. But it was mainly indebted, both in iconography and sculptured style, to the Gupta and post-Gupta art of India as seen in the cave-temples of Ajanta, Kanheri, Ellora, etc. [21]

In iconography, the Dvaravati sculpture invented hardly anything new. On the whole, they followed the example of Indian cave-temples faithfully. But they introduced a few variations, such as the standing Buddha image. For instance, in Indian art of Amaravati as well as Gupta art, the right hand alone performs the gesture while the left hand grasps part of the robe, but Dvaravati art usually makes the left hand perform

21. Boribal, Buribhand, Luang & Griswold, A. B.: Thai Images of the Buddhas, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 18., p. 7.

the same gesture as the right. The Dvaravati sculptors were at their best in stone carving, chief among this production being no doubt the Buddha Images of different gestures and character. The modelling follows the Gupta idiom, but tends towards a greater simplification of forms which are firmer but less massive.

Sculpture of this period, besides stone carving regarded as the most skilful production of Dvaravati artists, are a large number of materials or symbolic productions such its the stone Wheel of Law and Gouching Deer (Fig. 4) also have been discovered in central Thailand i.e. from Nakon Pathom, Ratburi, U-Tong and other areas. All these are symbolic antiquities of Suvarnabhumi.

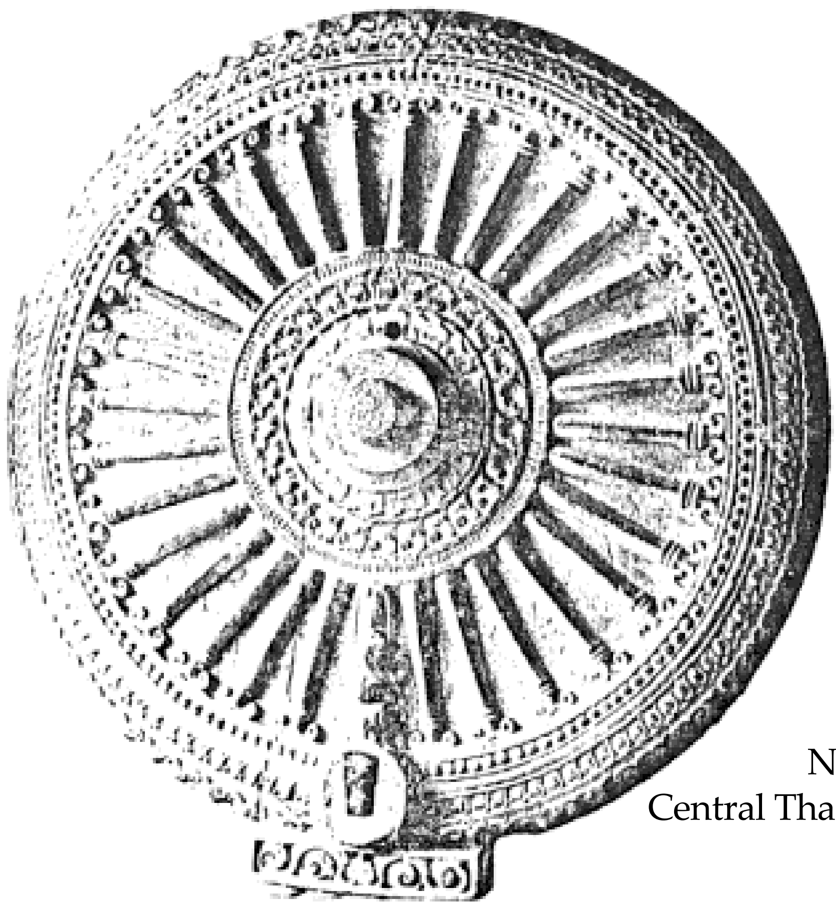


**Fig. 4**

Stone Wheel of Law found at Phra Pathom Chedi, Nakon Pathom Province, Central Thailand, Dvaravati Period

The Buddha Image in the Dvaravati school of art is the most outstanding feature. It is said that the Dvaravati Buddha Images clearly display influences of the Gupta and post-Guptu styles, which flourished in Central and Western India in the 4th–8th centuries. As the Dvartavati kingdom lasted a long time, its art was also influenced by the Pala style. Most of the Dvaravati Buddha images were carved in stone and only small ones were cast in bronze. There are two styles of the Buddha Image in this period:

1. The Early period and

2. The Later period.

The Early style of Buddha Image greatly resembles those of the Gupta and post-Gupta prototypes. The characteristics of the Buddha Image of this class consists of the small ushnisha or protuberance of the Buddha's skull, the distended ear-lobes, the spiral curls of the hair and their abnormal size, the elliptical form of the face, the prominent, bulging upper eyelids, the lightly outlined eyebrows in the form of a swallow springing from the top of the nose-bridge, the long eyebrows, unsmoothed forehead, the broad mouth, big hands and feet, and the modelling of the torso, where the limbs appear from under the robe like a nude sexless body under a fine diaphanous cloth (Fig.5).

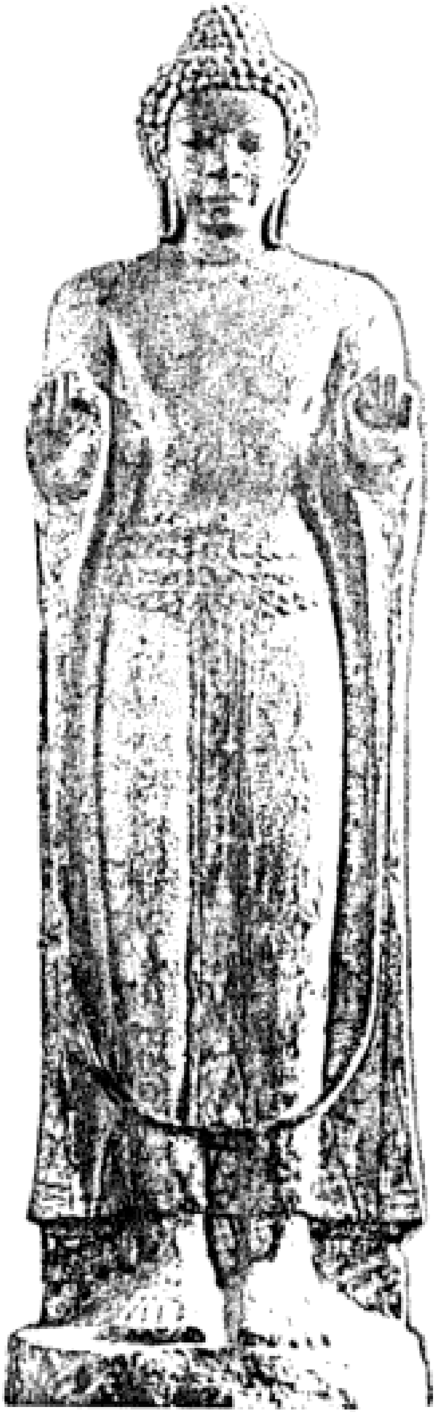


**Fig. 5**

Stone Standing
Buddha-Image
in the attitude
of benediction,
found at
Ayudhya Province,
Central Thailand,
Dvaravati Period

Thus the general appearance of the early Dvaravati Buddha Image is very similar to that of Indian images of the Gupta period, especially to those from Sarnath and the cave-temple of Ajanta.[22] Another feature of the Buddha Images is the thin robe closely attached to

22. Le May, Reginald: The Culture of South East Asia, p. 65.

the body. The robe has both the short form which ends over the chest and nipple, and the long form which spreads up to the navel.

The image pedestal obviously represents an expanded lotus-flower and the shape, with the large petal, in the middle of lotus-petal has the prominent axis, and it is surrounded by small lotus-petals. The pedestal consists of both up and down lotus designs of, a row of lotus-petals.

As for the standing Buddha Image, there appears the halo behind the Buddha's head. This halo differs in its feature from that of a Gupta image. The latter has the circular halo, while the Dvaravati's Buddha image has the halo in the form of carving a curved line around the head of the Buddha, formed to a pointed end on the top of halo itself. The Buddha Image of the early period is carved in the attitude of benediction.

The Dvaravati Buddha Image of the Later period has stronger indigenous features such as large hair-curls, a flat face, curved and connected eyebrows, prominent eyes, a flat nose and thick lips. The ushnisha or protuberance of the skull, along with the distended ear-lobes, and the supernatural anatomy, is not conspicuous. These features, which are clearly delineated, often recall a Mon racial type, and a delicate line, either incised or in relief accents the silhouette of the lips also.[23]

23. Boribal, Buribhand, Luang & Griswold, A. B.: Op. Cit., p. 7.

Another sculptural production which belongs to this school of art, besides the Buddha Image, has been found at Nakon Pathom in the form of many terracotta sculptures illustrating the heads of Hindu gods, called Devatta Heads. On the other hand, many stucco-sculptures were also carved to decorate the base of the Dvaravati temple, the ordination hall vihara and stupa. These stucco-sculptures were moulded into many forms such as Buddha Head dwarfs and Devata God or divinities and the statues of Bodhisattva Lokesvara (Fig. 6). It shows that the Buddhism of the Mahayana sect had also spread its influence into the Dvaravati period.



**Fig. 6**

Stucco Limestone: the Statues of Bodhisattva Lokitesavaras, Dvaravati Period

Besides terracotta figurines and stucco-sculpture, Dvaravati art also consists of other religious objects such as Buddhist votive tablets, which were found at Nakon Pathom, Ratburi, Supanburi, etc, the Buddhist holy sites.[24] Later on, they were moulded as icons by poor Buddhists who could not afford to buy stone or bronze statues.

Thus, this school of art flourished from the 7th century to the 13th century when it finally disappeared but its influence became the prototype of later Pure Thai school of arts, which imitated and adopted them.

The history of origin and introduction of Thai painting in this country is also an interesting subject. Its history may be traced back to the period of pre-Thai art. But the remains of the paintings still surviving from the earliest period are very few in number for the study of its evolution. Scholars believe that there are some remains of paintings of the Dvaravati period. They are regarded as the oldest paintings in this country.

It was the Dvaravati kingdom in Central Thailand which undoubtedly had connections with India during the Gupta period. It is reasonable to expect that an Indian tradition of paintings such as may be seen at the Ajanta Caves in India or the Sigiriya Hill in Ceylon would also be implanted in Thailand. We have only a few bits of rather crudely incised stones to

24. Department of Fine Arts: Op. Cit., p. 5.

show that the paintings belong to the Dvaravati period, but they are connected to the art of painting in India and Ceylon.

The Dvaravati crudely-incised stones represented the figure of man who is seated in the posture with knees raised with the arm stretched, touching the ground. Besides his body, there are the figures of a water-pot, wheel, conch shell and a star. According to archaeologists these paintings mean the four sacred objects, which were probably similar to those done by the Mons in Dvaravati in the Western Mon of Burma at Pagan around the 12th century A.D. (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7**

A noble man with four auspicious signs:
Engraved on stone, Dvaravati Period

## The Art of Sri-Vijaya Period
## (8th–13th Century A.D.)

In the South peninsula of Thailand, there arose a powerful kingdom between the 8th and 13th century A.D. in the Malay archipelago South of Thailand. This kingdom was called Sri-Vijaya kingdom, which at one time ruled over the island of Sumatra, Malaysia and Southern Thailand. The Buddhist art that developed in Southern Thailand during the Sri-Vijaya period has been termed as the Sri-Vijaya school of art, which is regarded by the historians and scholars as a further stage of early Buddhist art in Thailand, next to the late Dvaravati school of art.

The Sri-Vijaya kingdom had its capital city situatted in Sumatra island, in the east of Palembang. It was the most powerful maritime kingdom of South-East Asia since the 8th century A.D. Its dominion extended up to Java and the Malay archipelago, as well as Nakon Sritammarat (at that time called Tamalinga) and Chaiya (Carahi) in the South of Thailand. The art of Sri-Vijaya kingdom (the Buddhist art) also borrowed and imitated workmanship from India, like the Dvaravati school of art.

The Buddhist art of this period however belonged to the Mahaykana school as Mahayana or Northern Buddhism from India flourished in this kingdom from the beginning of the 7th century A.D. onwards. We do

not know exactly when the art of Sri-Vijaya kingdom borrowed the style of art from India, but scholars generally believe that Indian art spread to this land at the same time when the people from Southern India migrated to settle down in South-East Asia. The Indians established an empire called Champa Nagara or Champa, which was located near the coast of South Vietnam (in present time). The art of this empire and the Sri-Vijayan art closly resemble each other. Thus there is no doubt that both art styles came from India.

The Sri-Vijaya kingdom was established around the Southern Sea in the vicinity of Sumatra, Java, Bali, Borneo and Celebes island. I'tsing calls this kingdom Che-li-fo-che. But in the records of the Arab writers it is called as "the kingdom of Zabag",[25] which was the most powerful maritime power. The capital city was believed to have been located at Palembang in Sumatra Island,[26] which is still controversial.

The establishment of this kingdom represents a great and unique event in the history of South-East Asia, because this kingdom spread its dominion far and wide. About the eighth century A.D. this kingdom invaded Champa as well as the Water Chen-la empire. According to an Indian inscription of 8th century A.D.

25. For details: (Chatterjee, B. R.: Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia).

26. This view is confirmed by the accounts of I-Tsing who refers to the capital of Che-li-fo-che kingdom as Foche. Foche may be identified with Palembang in Eastern Sumatra.

the Sri-Vijaya army went to invade South India with a naval expedition, but failed.

Some scholars believe that the Sri-Vijaya kingdom was founded by the members of the Sailendra dynasty whose origin is still obscure. The history of this kingdom is closely connected with Java island, where two important dynasties flourished — the Sanjaya and Sailendra dynasties. The Sanjaya dynasty belonged to the Javanese nationality and worshipped Hinduism — Saivism. The Sailendra dynasty was a new powerful dynasty whose kings were followers of Mahayana Buddhism. Some scholars suggest that this dynasty was founded by the settlers who had migrated from the Kalinga state of India about 3rd century B.C. Others, however, hold that this dynasty was of Javanese origin.

Prof. G. Goedes believes that this dynasty had descended from the ancient dynasty of Funan empire. When the Funan empire was destroyed by the Chen-la invasion, the people moved towards the South in Java, and consequently conquered the king of the Sanjaya dynasty of Java. Thus, they established their kingdom and named their dynasty as Sailendra (King of the Mountain).

The members of the Sailendra dynasty also came to rule over Sri-Vijaya kingdom of Sumatra till the last phase of its destruction resulting from three powerful foreign invasions:

1. King Rajindra Chola I of the Chola Dynasty of South India.

2. The Majapahit empire of Java situated to the south of Sri-Vijaya and
3. The Sukhothai kingdom of Thailand under King Ram Khaemhang.

The records of the Arab writers and inscriptions prove that the people of this kingdom were the followers of the Mahayana Buddhist sect. In the field of art, the Sri-Vijaya art may be regarded as one of the perfect early Buddhist arts in South-East Asia. In Java, Sumatra and other island-countries, many of the Buddhist monuments and antiquities bear strong Mahayana character.

The great stupa of Borobudur in Central Java and Chandi-stupu in that island are dedicated to the Mahayana divinities Bodhisattva and Dhyani Buddha, for example. In South Thailand, Sri-Vijaya art, both in architecture and sculpture, had its great impact in Chaiya sub-district of Surathani Province, Songkha Province, at Ra-Not and Cha-Ting-Pra sub districts of Nakon Sri-Tammarat Province, and at Ta-Kua-Pa. Also in other parts of the country, the remains of this school of art have been found in U-Tong of Supannaburi Province and at Sukhothai of North and Central Thailand.[27]

The Sri-Vijaya school of Buddhist art received its artistic inspiration and workmanship from the Gupta, post Guptaj Amravati and Pal-Sena schools of art.

27. Department of Fine Arts: The Brief History and Archaeology of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, p. 18.

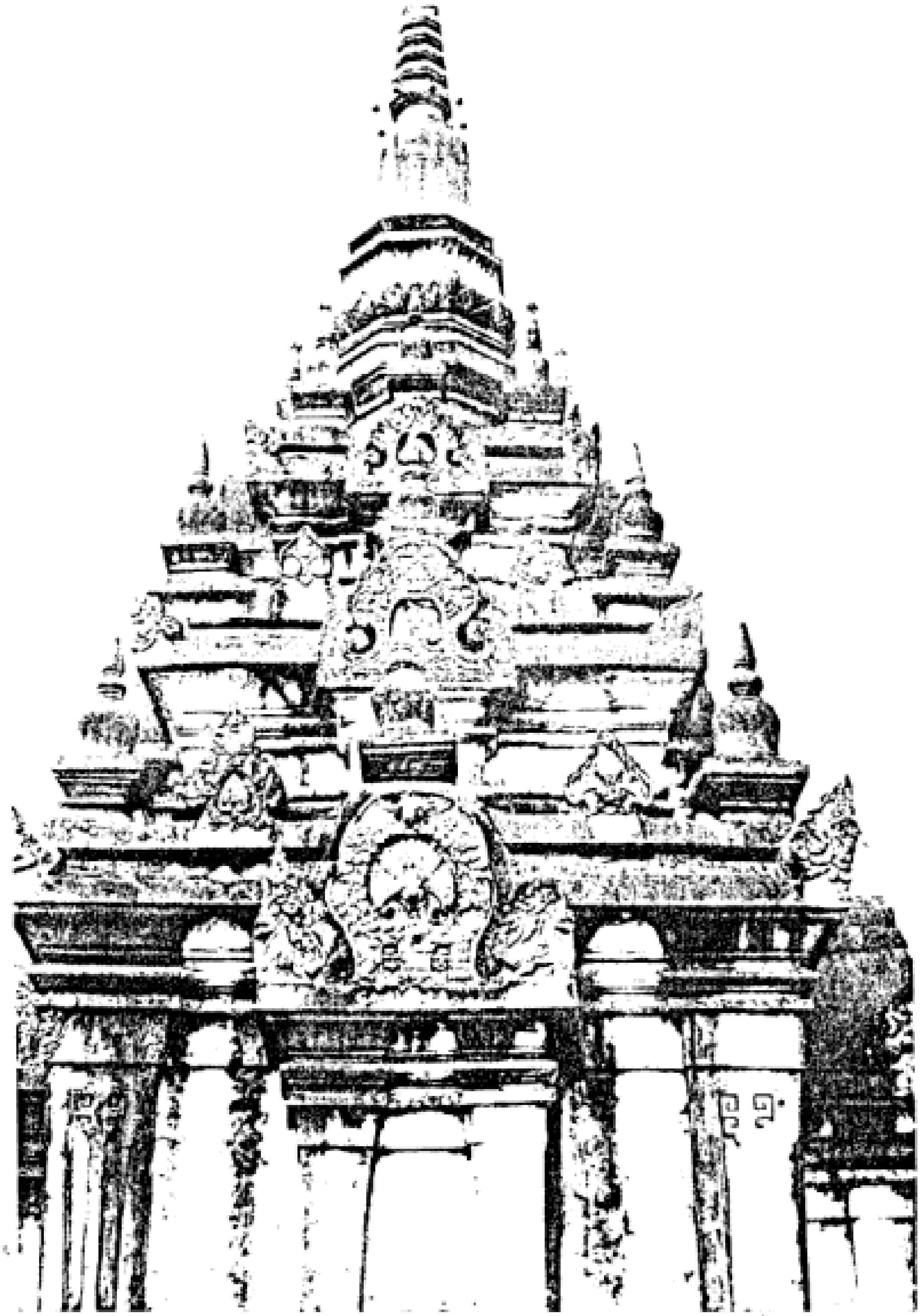
Antiquities of this period, either in stone or bronze that have been discovered in Southern Thailand are so similar to those found in Java or Sumatra that sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish them, because most of them are of one and the same artistic elements Mahayan Buddhism. But, apart from Buddhist antiquities of this period, Brahmanic objects have also been found in some provinces of South Thailand.

It is said that most of Sri-Vijayan architecture was represented at Chaiya, Surathani, which was without doubt a very important centre during the Sri-Vijaya period. The monuments of this period were built in dedication of Mahayana Buddhism. The type of structure consists of a mondop or cell-chamber to house the Buddha Image while the summit of the structure was erected in the form of stupa with successive, superimposed terraces. The best example is at Pra Barom That Chaiya (Fig. 8 on the page following this one).

This type resembles the small Chandi or Stupa in Java island. The monument at Nakon Sri-Tammarat also has its best style consisting of the body of structure decorated with arch-niches. The top of structure consists of five towers. There is a central and large tower placed in the middle, while the other four small towers are placed in each of the corners of the structure. This signifies the universe having the same architecture as in Java. The sculptural objects of Sri-Vijaya art in this period are the images of Mahayana deities, chief

among them being the statue of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. On the other hand the Buddha Images with different gestures were also created during this period.

**Fig. 8**



Stupa Pra Barom That at Wat Phra Mahathat, Chaiya, Surathani Province, South Thailand, Sri-Vijaya period

The Buddha Image belonging to this school of art shows the artistic inspiration and workmanship of art of the Pala-Sena period. The ushnisha or protuberance of the skull is like that of Dvaravati art and consists of the skull with the slight, small curl hair-knot. But, in some Buddha Images, there is an urna between the eyebrow or middle of the forehead. The figure of a Bodhi leaf always is attached in front of the ushnisha of the Buddha, the smoothed forehead and the arched and curved eyebrows, flat face like the late Dvaravati style of the Buddha Image.

Other features are the unsquare chin-shape type and soft lips and mouth. The end of the robe consists of both types as short end over the chest and the long-end hanging down up to the navel. There is a large lotus-petal accompanied by the small one up to three lotus-petals in the pedestal. The hands and feet of the Buddha are gentle and slender along with the body, unlike in Dvaravati art. Thus, the style of the Sri-Vijaya Buddha Image represents the advanced stage of the art of Buddha Image in the pre-Thai Buddhist art.

The outstanding sculptural production of this period is the statue of Bodhisattva Avalokitesavara, the supreme divinity of Mahayana Buddhism. At Chaiya, in Surathani Province, and other provinces of South Thailand, the images of that Mahayana deity have been discovered. Its features bear the strong Gupta and Pala-Sena influence. One statue of the

Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara from Chiya is regarded as the masterpiece of sculpture in this period.

One interesting feature of this statue is the cord or sacred thread running from the left shoulder down the body and reaching below the waist. This is part of the sacred thread of the "twice-born", of which the remainder on the back of the figure is invisible. It has no connection with the similar thread hanging over the right shoulder.

Other features of these statues are the original and attractive form of the crown, and the jewelled ornaments on the neck and arms as well as the streamers, like strands of hair, falling on both shoulders. There is the scarf or fold of the robe across the body in addition to the thread already mentioned (Fig. 9).[28]

Apart from the statue of the Bodhisattva, some Sri-Vijaya art objects were found from a field for instance, the Mahayana figure of Maitreya Bodhisattva. This deity is the "Future" Buddha, it was also found in the North-Eastern part of Thailand. The figure was probably imported from the South. But the peculiar feature of sculpture of this period is the Buddha under the Naga image. This image is not in the usual attitude of meditation, but in the attitude of subduing Mara the Evil, which is rather rare. On the base of the Naga is inscribed a date equivalent to 1183 A.D. and thus it can be regarded as late Sri-Vijaya sculpture.

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28. Le May, Reginald: Op. Cit., p.p. 81–84. Cf. Kramrisch, Stella: Pala and Sena Sculpture.

[Unintelligble information from bad photocopy of this material] …Surathani Province, South Thailand, Sri-Vijaya Period (8th–13th Century A.D.)



**Fig. 9**

In the Sri-Vijaya period in Southern Thailand, we have the remains of paintings belonging to this period. It is the oldest painting of which some traces are found on two walls of Silpa Cave, half-way up a low mountain in a hamlet or tambon named Na Tham of Yala province. The paintings were defaced by fanatics soon after their discovery at few years ago, but enough remains to discern rows of Buddha Images with disciples, and

three standing female figures with leaf-shaped halos, presumably daughters of Mara (Fig.10) and one of which might portray Mekhala (the goddess of lightning ) and Ramasun (the god of thunder). The pigments are a muddy red, black, blue and yellow. The style of this oldest painting seems to be the mixture of Sinhalese and Sri-Vijaya styles of painting. Its date could be about the end of the 13th century A.D. Though the paintings in Silpa Cave have more or less greatly deteriorated, and are of a late period and rather inexequisite workmaanship, they are still of great importance because they are the only example of Sri-Vijaya painting ever found in Thailand.

The art in Sri-Vijaya period flourished from the 8th century A.D. without any break till the last part of the 13th century A.D. when the kingdom of Sri-Vijaya came to an end due to the invasions of other powerful kingdoms in both the South and North. With the collapse of the kingdom, the art also slowly and gradually disappeared from the land.

**Fig. 10**

Three females
(probably the
daughter of Mara):
the Mural painting in
Silpa Cave, Yala,
Sri-Vijaya Period





# Lopburi

# The Art of Lopburi Period (11th–13th Century A.D.)

The final state of the early or pre-Thai art in Thailand is to be seen in the art of the Lopburi period. It is the pre-Thai art, which bears strong influence of Khmer art. It is said that in the central, Eastern and North-Eastern parts of Thailand a new style of early Buddhist art is found, both in architecture and sculpture, which has affinities with the Khmer art of Kambuja or Cambodia.

This period is known as the Khmer period in Thailand. According to Siamese archaeological circles, it is generally understood that the period of Khmer dominion extended over Central Thailand, including the valley of the Menam River, with its chief centre at Lopburi or Lavo.

It is believed that during the occupation of the whole of Central Thailand and the valley of Menam river by the Khmers, besides political establishment in this land, the artistic activities of Khmers also took place there, especially at the town of Lavo or Lopburi. The political and cultural domination of the Khmers covered this area for nearly three centuries.

The close relationship between the Khmers and the primitive tribes during this period marked the movement in the field of cultural and artistic activities in Thailand before the migration of the Thai people into

Indo-China and in the land which now comprises Thailand.

Besides the Khmer's dominion over the Menam valley of Central Thailand, the Khmers had also ruled upon the ancient Mon Kingdom of Dvaravati, and some principalities in North of present Thailand. The Khmer King divided the Dvaravati kingdom into two separate provinces, which formed the headquarters of Khmer dominion. It was ruled by a Khmer general or Viceroy. The Northern Province had its headquarters at Sukhothai and the Southern Province had Lavo or Lopburi as its centre.

After the establishment of the Angkor empire by Jayavarman II up to the beginning of the l0th century A.D., Hinduism of the Saivite sect became the state religion with the introduction of the Deva-Raja cult by that king. The Khmer monuments in the form of stone sanctuarys or temples, called Prasad Hin (Prasad=Sanctuary, Hin=stone in the Thai language) were found scattered in several towns of the present Thailand. All these monuments were dedicated to the Brahmanic deities. They were mainly Saivite monuments, because the Khmers during this period of construction, were the followers of Saivism. The Khmer monuments were in Siamese territory especially at the town of Lopburi, where even now several large and perfect Khmer monuments can be seen. This means that Lopburi was the most important centre of Khmer dominion and authority. The style of

these monuments closely resembles the style in the Khmer empire itself.

King Jayavarman VII (1181–1220) was a Buddhist king, who spread his political and artistic power in the whole of the Khmer empire and vassal state, including the towns in present Thai territory. He built many monuments to commemorate the supreme deity of Mahayana school of Buddhism such as the temples of Sayon, Ta-Prohm, Prah-Khan, Banteay Kadai, etc. He further spread his political dominion toward the North-Eastern and Central parts of modern Thailand at the beginning of 12th centuryA.D., which is confirmed by one of the Khmer inscriptions,[29] as well as the remains of the Khmer temples bearing Buddhist elements in several towns in Central and North-Eastern parts of modern Siamese territory.

All these temples were built to shelter the statues of this King. The name of this statue is Jayabuddhamahanatha.

After the end of 12th A.D. the Thai people who came from Southern China for their livelihood, started entering the Indo-Chinese peninsula, especially the area now called the present Thailand. There was long warfare between them and the Khmers, who were defeated by the Thais. The Thais gained complete control over the Khmers towards the close of 13th century A.D. The Thais set up their independent kingdom

29. For details: (Coedes, George.: Angkor, p. 24).

named Sukhothui or Sukhodaya. The Thais finally smashed the Khmer power in the middle of the 15th century A.D., and Kambuja or Cambodia became a Vassal state of Thailand. Right up to modern times, Angkor itself was in the Siamese territory until it was ceded to France as late as 1907 A.D.

The Lopburi school of art has its chronology based on the periods of similar Khmer art in Cambodia, for instance the Angkor Wat style of art (circa 1110–1175 A.D.) at the time of King Suryavarman II, who built the Angkor Wat temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu (or Vaisnavism), or the Bayon style of art (circa 1177–1230 A.D.) which flourished in the days of King Jayavarman VII, who built the Bayon temple which marked the prominent monument of Mahayana elements and workmanship.

But, some of the Lopburi antiquities found in Thailand are, however, much older than these two Khmer periods.[30] Some of them might date back to the 7th century A.D., but most of the objects and monuments date only from the 11th century A.D. onwards. The Lopburi objects are carved from stone or cast in bronze. Most of the Buddhist objects belong to the Mahayana workmanship.

The architecture of the Lopburi school of art available in Lopburi and other towns in central and North-

30. For details: (Na Faknam, N.: Art of the Buddha Image, pp.154–156).

Eastern parts of Thailand are of great significance by virtue of their peculiar features, which bear the strong influence of Khmer art. Both Brahmanical as well as Buddhist Mahayana monuments appeared in Thailand.

The outstanding monument of this period is Prasad Hin or stone temple at Lopburi. The stone temple of this period at Pimai, Nakon Ratchasima Province, is regarded as one of the best examples of Khmer architecture in Thailand. This temple appears to be Buddhistic, probably of the Mahayanistic order judging from the carved lintels over the doors of the main sanctuary. The stone temple of Pimai is enclosed within a rectangular wall.

Archeological researches have shown that the origin of this temple dates back to the time of Jayavarman II in the ninth century A.D. Its plan comprises a square or rectangular form, there being a one-side door-entrance. The other three door-entrances were in the form of flake door. The main sanctuary has the portico in front. Also in some cases, a group of viharas accompanied the main sanctuary with a verandah or gallery to connect them.[31]

At Lopburi, there are many large and perfect Khmer monuments, but prominent among them were two main Khmer temples. Wat Maha-Tat and Pra Prang Sam Yot (the temple of the three stupas or the

31. Department of Fine Arts: The Lopburi Art in Thailand, p. 37.

temple of three towers,[32] Wat Maha-Tat has its architectural features on the usual plan of a sanctuary-tower with a mandapa attached to the whole in a walled enclosure and it seems to carry the eye with it as it soars upward to heaven. The Pra Prang Sam Yot stands on rising ground. The design and conception in the construction of this temple are not Buddhistic, but Brahmanic. The three towers of this temple ranged alongside one another inevitably bring to mind the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu. Non-Buddhist figures too, have been found on the towers — bearded figures with their hands resting on clubs, which also points to an originally Brahmanic construction.

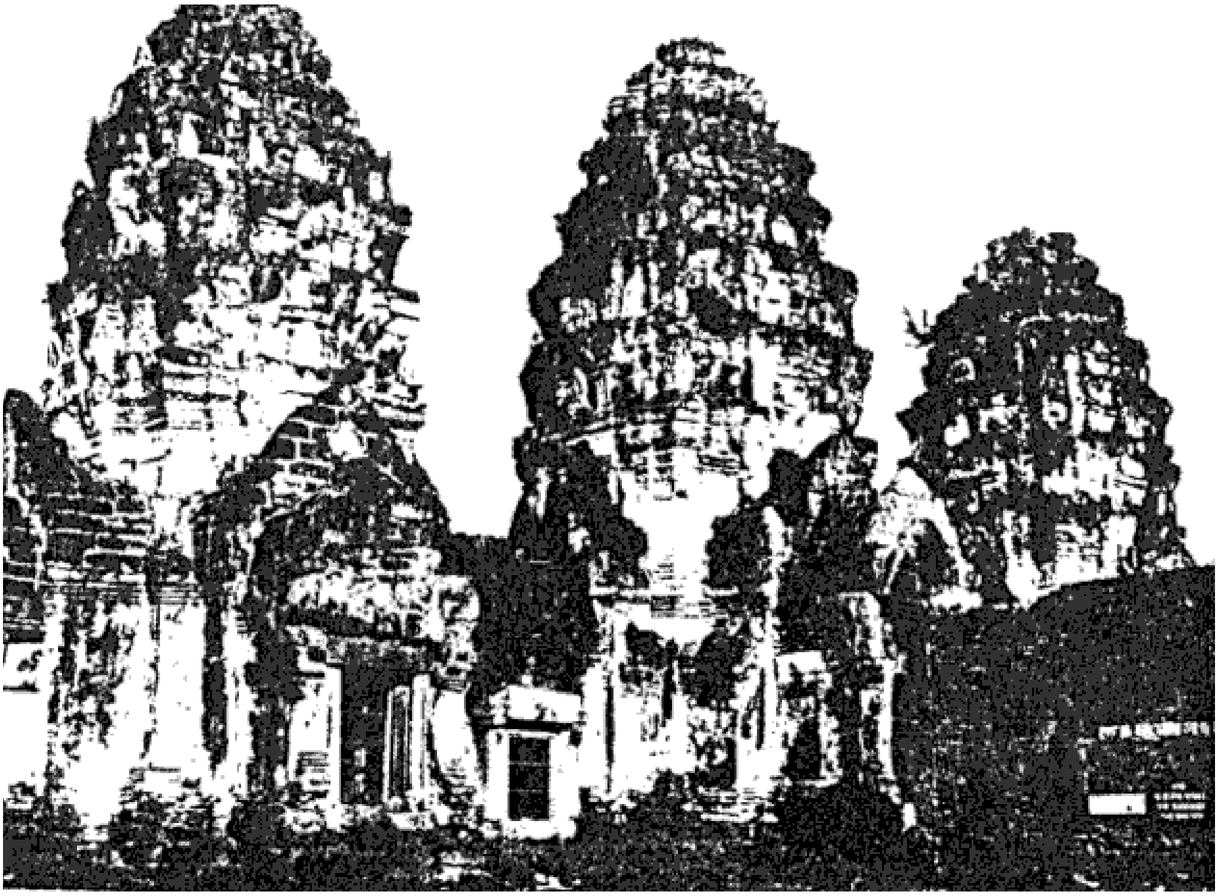
Three of these towers, called Prang, represent the peculiar form of Khmer architecture. The Prang for the first time appears in Thailand and later on, this style of architecture became one of the developed religious structures of Thai Buddhist art. The Prang shape was closely similar to Prang or tower of Angkor Wat or a Bayon temple and other Khmer towers in the 11th century A.D.

The Prang was composed of stone or brick alongside from below to top accompanied by the design of a jackfruit petal as its decoration. This style of architecture in pyramidal shape, no doubt, bears the strong

32. The Thai word designated the great monument in Lopburi School of Art, located in Lopburi as Pra-Prang-stupa or temple, Sam means three, Yod means towers, summit.

influence of Indian architecture of the sikhara of the Indian temple in Indo-Aryan or North Indian style. The Indian sikhara may be regarded as the prototype of Khmer prang which was borrowed later by the Thai architects (Fig. 11).

**Fig. 11**



The temple of Phra Prang Sam Yot: Lopburi Province, Central Thailand, Architecture of Lopburi Period

Generally speaking, the architecture of this period differs slightly from the Khmer Monuments in Kambuja proper. The architectural buildings of Lopburi usually have a low basement of foundation, not erected on the high platform like the Khmer monuments.

One of the important features of this architecture is that the temple has no window, but there is the wind-

hole instead of the former. In this art also, the stupa (in Thai called Chedi) is present in the form of a square in plan. There are five successive superimposed terrace-squares. The fifth terrace is the main and large stupa. In each of the square terraces, there are the niches to shelter the standing Buddha Images. The corner of each stupa-terrace is decorated with the miniature small stupa.

The town planning of this period was square in plan. In the geometric centre of town planning, space was reserved to erect the main, large temple as the centre of town. There used to be several temples in Buddhistic as well as Saivite and Vaisnavite character. The town consisted of gate-entrances and the fort with semi-laterite enclosures. This style of town-planning was, no doubt, similar to the town-planning of the city of Angkor Thom, built by King Jayavarman VII in Kambuju, of which the Bayon temple was the important central sanctuary in the geometric Centre of Angkor Thom. Thus, it may rightly be said that the town-planning of the Lopburi period is a miniature replica of Angkor Thom.

The Lopburi School of art produced perfect sculpture in bronze and stone. The sculptures of Mahayana divinity consist of several styles and gestures such as the statues of Bodhisattva Lokesvara and Mahayana goddess Prajnaparamita. For Mahayana propagation the Lopburi art borrowed its style from the Sri-Vijaya

art and Kambuja itself and the Hinayana elements from the art of Dvaravati period. There are several Buddha Images in different mudras or gestures.

But the most popular style of Buddha Image in this period is the seated Buddha Image under the Naga called Pra Nag Prok (in Thai) meaning the Buddha seated under the hood of the Naga's head. Naga is the great serpent which appears in Hindu and Khmer mythology. On the other hand, the decorated Buddha Images with ornaments were also available in this period.

The Lopburi artists also carved the statues of both Brahmanic deities Siva and Vishnu, whose worship was popular in Kambuja and Lopburi. The style belonged to the Khmer Angkor Wat style and some of them were of typical Bayon style. The materials used are sandstone and bronze. The style of the Buddha Images of Lopburi art consisted of a single image seated or standing on a pedestal, or seated under the Naga.

From the late 12th century A.D., however, the artist carved a group of Buddhas on the same pedestal for the first time.[33] Sometimes, the Mahayana Triratna (Three Gems) is shown personified by the Buddha under the Naga in the middle, flanked by the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara on the right and the Mahayana goddess Prajnaparamita on the left. For Brahmanic

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33. For details: (Department of Religion: Hinayana and Mahayana Sects of Buddhism, p. 65).

images, for instance, we have images of Lord Siva, Vishnu and Visvakarma.

The characteristics of the Buddha images of this school of art consist of two styles — the Early and Late Lopburi style. The early style represented the Buddha Image, with the ushnisha or protuberance on the skull in the form of a low gland like that of Dvaravati ushnisha, but the shape assumed different forms as the coil of a shell or shape of a small cone. The other was in the shape of a crown and a lotus flower surrounded with its petals. There are two styles of hair as the parallel fold hair and the curls of hair. Also the parting line round the top-knot of the Buddha can be seen. The head-dress and low crown of the Buddha's head are available.

The face of the Buddha is broad and square in shape with large, thick mouth and lip, prominent eyebrow, and prominent nose and square chin. The Buddha's robe is of two forms: the robe covering the whole of the body in the case of the standing Buddha and robe with bare right shoulder in the case of the seated Buddha image. The end of the robe is hanging down up to the navel. The rim of a skirt-like lower robe was in prominent position. The ear is long which extendeds up to the shoulder. In the case of the decorated ornamented Buddha there are neck-bracelets, arm-bracelets and necklaces around the neck and the upper part of the Buddha's body.

The Buddha's pedestal is in the form of a lotus flower in both forms of up and down lotus-petal. The petal of a lotus is in the form of the rim line at the end of each petal.

On the other hand, the Late Lopburi Buddha image consists of the following features. The head is not in the form of square but in oval shape. There is another line or rim attached at the mouth of the Buddha. The design of ushnisha is in the form of a long lotus petal and the small halo placed the middle of a lotus ushnisha. This halo is cone-like. In the case of the Buddha with the Naga, the peculiar features are the eyes which are sunk in the face. The beard and moustache also can be seen. The skirt-like lower rob is illustrated by the prominent rim at the waist and ankle of the Buddha. The end of this robe is in the form of rectangular cloth appearing in front of a girdle. The halo of the Buddha is the seven- hooded uncrowned Naga which stretched over the head of the Buddha.[34] The coil of the Naga's body consisted of three parts. The Buddha's face is shown in sensitive and benign attitude, smiling like in the Bayon period in Kambuja. The Buddha Images of this period have been classified under seven different mudras or gestures the most prominent of which is mudra of the Buddha under the seven-hooded uncrowned Naga as already related above (Fig. 12).

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34. Department of Fine Arts: The Siamese Buddha Image; Cf. Boribal Buribhand, Luang: The Thai Images of the Buddha, p. 42.

**Fig. 12**

The Stone Seated Buddha under a Naga, found at Wat Na Phra Meru, Ayudhya Province, Central Thailand — Art of Lopburi Period



The statues of the Bodhisattva during this period consist of the figure of small Dhyani Buddha placed in front of the ushnisha of the statue. The head of the statue is square and the forehead is straight. The jaw is square and firm and the eyebrows are almost straight. The nose is rather flattened and the mouth is long with full lips. The eyes look downward and seem almost

closed. The hair is no longer formed of spiral curls but seems like scales divided by partition lines. The whole gives the appearance of a strong, ruthless being, which is too human to fulfil the conditions necessary for the representation of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva.[35]

Besides this, there is no trace of painting from Lopburi period in Thailand.

Thus, the Lopburi school of art flourished for nearly two centuries up to the latter part of the 13th century A.D. The Thai people who came from Southern China became now the new powerful leaders of Indo-Chinese Peninsula replacing the Khmer political dominion. But the Lopburi school of art still flourished and the remains of the monuments and antiquities can be seen even today.

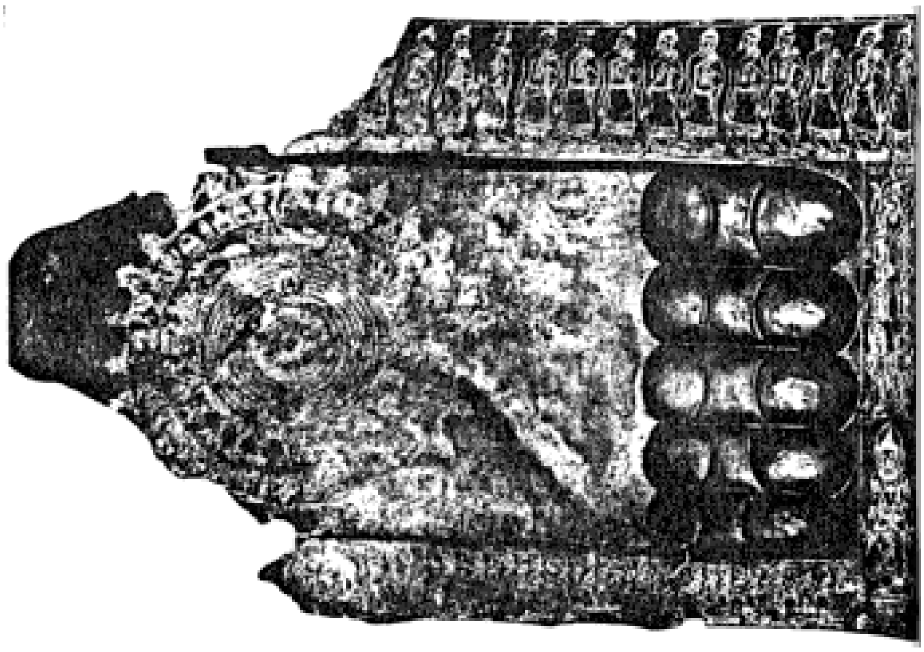


**Fig. 25a**

Drawing (Bronze?) of the Buddha's Footprint from Wat Phra Sadet Khamphaeng-phet, Sukhothai Period [Detail is on page 32, Fig. 25b]

35. L. Le May, Reginald: Op. Cit., pp. 150–151.

# Chapter V

## The Development of Buddhist Art in Thailand

Let us now study the real Thai Buddhist art, produced by Thai artists. The real Thai art flourished in Thailand from the beginning of the Siamese history — late 13th century A.D., and to the present day. The Thai people, who came to settle in Thailand, had their own artistic activities and this Thai art is closely connected with Siamese history. They imitated or adopted some aspects of art from the primitive Buddhist art available in this country. The early Buddhist arts of Mon, Khmer or Sri-Vijayan people served as the prototypes of the new Thai Buddhist art. But the fact is that the principal prototype of all Buddhist arts (pre-Thai or real Thai) is Indian art, through successive imitations or adaptations through the centuries from the original mould.

According to historians and archaeologists the real Thai Buddhist art can be classified into five different schools of art in successive periods:

1. Chiengsaen
2. Sukhothai
3. U-Tong
4. Ayudhya and
5. Bangkok (school of art.)

It is to be noted that the trace of the first three Pre-Thai schools of art such as Dvaravati, Sri-Vijaya and Lopburi periods still survives in the new Thai art. But, the Thais did not adopt them in all aspects of art. Their artistic activities were taken up in the form of individualised and independent art which came from the skilful and artistic inspiration of the Thai people themselves. The art in Thailand deals with an independent art with some influence of Indian art only, not directly taken from the first three early Buddhist art schools in this country. The real Thai Buddhist art changed the new form of artistic activities which differ from the early pre-Thai art. Every aspect of art such as architecture, sculpture, etc. of real Thai art is represented independently in conception and production.

## Development of Architecture the Buddhist art of Thailand

New forms of architectural buildings came to be created by the Thai people in dedication to Hinayana Buddhism.[36] The style of religious buildings during this time became the general architectural feature of the early school of Thai art such as Chiengsaen, Sukhothai and U-Tong. The new features of the Thai architecture consisted of several styles:

36. For details: Silpa Bhirasi, Prof.: Thai Buddhist Art (Architecture), Thai Culture, New Series, No. 4, pp. 8–9.

## Architectural Features of Thai Religious Buildings — The Wat or Monastery

The Wat or monastery refers to a group of religious buildings generally enclosed by a wall with gateways. From artistic point of view, the principal religious buildings in Thailand are: the Pra Chedi, the Bot and Vihara, the Phra Prang, the Mondop and Prasad. The other structures architecturally not very important are: the Kuti, Ho-trai, Sala Kan Parien, ordinary Salas and Ho Rakhang. One Wat or monastery, may contain some of these structures, especially the Bot or all of them.[37] The general feature of the Wat is the outer enclosure of a temple which was always rectangular, and generally of greater length than width. The enclosure walls were as a rule about 3 ft. thick and from 12 to 14 ft. high.[38]

The prominent structure of Wat or monastery is the enclosing wall with its gateways which can be compared with Indian architecture, to trace the origin — direct or indirect — of certain features of Thai architecture. The Thai gateways have such a variety of designs that one can say that each Wat has a proper type. In these gateways we have reminiscences of Indian forms

37. Cf. Silpa Bhirasi, Prof.: The Arts of Architecture and Painting, p. 9.

38. Fergusson, James: History of Indian Eastern Architecture, Vol. 2, p. 406.

of gopuram. As regards the other features it can be said that the superstructure of the Thai gateway has its relation to the functional parts of the old Indian Buddhist monasteries, because the superstructure of many religious and secular Thai buildings maintain, although much conventionalized, the same elements of old Indian architecture.

## The Uposatha or Temple

The Uposatha is one form of Thai religious structure corresponding to an Indian Chaitya hall where monks assemble to pray. Its classic type has a rectangular plan. At its end, it enshrines a large gilded seated Buddha image modelled whether in stucco or cast in bronze. The image is placed over a high pedestal with rich ornamentation.

The Origin of the Uposatha can be traced to the old Indonesian-Thai house of thatched material. The style of that structure has a simple rectangular, planned building with accentuated sloping roofs covered with glazed tiles in colour. The slight concave of these roofs suggests the abasement of the thatched bamboo roof of the prototype common house caused by the heavy tropical rains.[39] The superimposed layers of roofs are a characteristic of wooden structures due to the projecting additions to the main portion of the building, the prominent projection of the eaves being typical of

39. Ferogi, Prof.: The March of Thailand, p. 26.

tropical countries to protect the building from sun and rain.

At both ends of the ridge of each roof of the religious or royal building, there is that peculiar hornlike finial culled Cho-Fa (bunch of sky). We cannot say anything definitely about the meaning of this element, but we would like to suggest that it derives from the horned-mask we notice in the same point of the buildings, used for magic or animistic purposes, as found in Indonesia and other parts of the Pacific Islands.[40]

The architectural characteristic of the Thai Uposatha or temple in other parts, besides its roof, is a raised structure over a basement which varies in height from about 50 cm. to 1.50 metre. In the lateral sides of the ancient Bot there are some gate-like openings akin to the windows of Khmer temples. The Uposatha may have one, two or three doors on both sides, front and rear. It may be a simple rectangular structure without any addition of porches or colonnade around it. Or, quite the contrary it may have porches in front and rear or porches and a range of pillars around it like the Greek peristyle temple. The interior may be formed by a simple ample nave or by a nave and two aisles with pillars.

The doors and windows of the Thai Uposatha are decorated with ornamental frames in stucco, gilded

40. For details: Silpa Bhirasi, Prof.: Op. Cit., p. 12.

and windows. Those of the doors are decorated outside with gilded lacquer ornaments while, in general, the interiors have mythical figures of guardians painted in vivid colours. Some bots instead of lacquer decoration have ornaments in inlaid mother of pearl. In this case the design of the ornaments is very elaborate.

In Thai architecture, the pillars of the interior and exterior of the Uposatha are actagoval or round, with capitals in the form of lotus flowers. The lotus capital of pillar appears in the Sukhothai and Ayudhya arts also. In the later period, the petals of the lotus flower on the capital were more and more elaborate becomming merely ornamental. The interior pillars of the Uposatha are generally enriched with painted ornaments, the shaft pillar painted in red and enriched with gilded ornaments.

Other architectural features of the Uposatha are at outside, around this structure — eight Semas (Sima) having the form of the Indian cell. The Semas may be placed over some basement or may be contained in some small square temple-like structures. They indicate the holiness of the ground over which the Uposatha is erected.

The most important aspect of the Uposatha is its interior, which like the Chaitya hall of Indian rock-cut architecture, contains the worship object in the form of a stupa. But it is in the form of huge Buddha Image

(instead of a stupa) in case of the Thai Uposatha. The interior corner-end of the Uposatha contains a large gilded sitting Buddha Image, cast in bronze or modelled in stucco. The walls of the Uposatha are either plain or decorated with paintings all over the surface while the window-panels are externally decorated with lacquer-work, called Lai Rot Nam in Thai language and internally decorated with mythological figures painted in bright colours. These are the general architectural features of the Uposatha or temple in real Thai art.

## The Vihara

The Vihara[41] is the replica of the Bot and is used to house the Buddha Image. It is generally built in the centre of the courtyard enclosed by a gallery, walled outside and open inside having generally square pillars to support the roof. Along the gallery there are many Buddha Images, modelled in stucco or in bronze. Other features of the Thai Vihara are more gateways giving access to the courtyard. The roof of the galleries and gateways is covered with the universally used glazed tiles in brilliant colours, while the walls are painted in white.

41. The term Vihara refers to a hall containing images of the Buddha and so the Thai Vihara corresponds to the building. But referring in the history of Indian Buddhist architecture the term Vihara has been generally understood as the residence of the Buddhist monks, the monastery. (Ibid., p. 16).

## The Phra Chedi or Stupa

According to Buddhist tradition, the most venerated religious structure for a Buddhist is the stupa. The stupa was meant to contain the relics of the Lord Buddha, but in later periods this structure was also used to contain relics of kings, holy men and other noble personages.

The stupa is known in Siamese as Chedi, or Phra Chedi. In one Wat there may be just one Chedi of a fairly large size or there may be several of them of varying sizes and decorative schemes. The word Phra is an honorific meaning "exalted" and is derived from the Sanskrit Vara. The honorific is usually prefixed to an object of veneration pertaining to religion or royalty. The second part of this name Chedi is the Siamese equivalent of the Pali Cetiya and the Sanskrit Caitya. This kind of monument signifies the tumulus raised over the ashes of the dead.[42] In Thailand nowadays Phra Chedi just means a sacred monument or a reliquary. To understand the development of Phra Chedi or Stupa in Thai architecture, one must go back to ancient times.

The origin and introduction of the stupa took place in India which is the land of the foundation of Buddhism. The first Buddhist monuments were erected by the Buddhists in India in order to worship the commemorative

42. Anumun Rajadhan, Phya,: Phra Chedi, Thailand Culture Series, Vol. 40, Part I, p. 3.

objects of the Lord Buddha himself. It is the stupa whose prototype originated in Central India for the first time after the death of the Buddha. The Indian stupa of that time comprised the drum or basement, the dome (and/or a tumulus) surmounted by a cubical chair symbolizing the seat of the Buddha and a Chattra (umbrella) over it, which originally had only one tier but later on became a slender pinnacle formed by many tiers.

The best specimens of Indian stupas are the great stupas of Sanchi and Bharhut in India, which were erected during the days of Emperor Asoka, when Buddhism spread outside India, especially in South-East Asia and Far-East Asia. Buddhist art from India was also introduced in those regions. Naturally the Indian stupa became the prototype of the Buddhist stupa in those regions. Its style bears traces of influence from the Indian stupa of Sanchi and other places. On the other hand, the Thai Phra Chedi bears in it features of some influence of South Indian architecture of Sikhara form also.

A Thai Phra Chedi may be divided for analytical purposes into four parts, namely:

1. The plinth;
2. The dome-shaped structure called the "bell"
3. The platform; and
4. The spire.

The bell or dome shaped structure of Thai Chedi corresponds to the anda or round tumulus which surrounded the balustrade in the Indian stupa of Sanchi.

Later, with further development of this part of the stupa in Thailand, the bell or dome-shaped structure often took a rectangular form, with or without reduced angles or corners and other decorations. Thus, it differs significantly from the original prototype of the Indian stupa. Also the balustrade of an Indian stupa's lowest tier is sometimes widened to form a terrace for circumambulation.

Above the bell or dome-shaped structure at the "neck of the bell" is a small quadrangular platform called in Siamese Banlang (in Pali, pallanka) with a number of colonnades above it. This platform is characteristic of the Sinhalese style. The platform might have been a place where a symbol of the relic within was deposited. Above the platform we have the slender tapering spire. The lower part of this latter section consists of circles diminishing in diameter, superimposed one upon the other, called in Siamese Plong Chanai.[43]

These circles or plong chanai have no doubt been developed from the idea of terraced parasols dimin-

43. The word Chanai is the name of a musical instrument of the hautboi kind with many circles round its body. It is perhaps the same as the Indian oboe of Seramai, Shenai and Malay Oboe of Suranai, a kind of a hautboi which is again to be found in Persia. (Anuman Rajadhon, Op. Cit., p. 159.)

ishing in diameter as they rise to the top of the spire. Sometimes the circles take the shape of lotus flowers known in Siamese as the Bua Klum meaning lotus clusters. Above the circles is the Pli or plantain bud, so called on account of its shape. This again may be divided into the upper and lower pli with a round ball in between. At the culminating point of the upper pli is another round ball, called in Siamese yad-nam-khang or dew-drop.

And the last architectural feature of the Phra Chedi is the liem in Siamese designation. It is a number of flat pieces with pointed top arranged round the axis of spiral structure. Its upper part rises in three diminishing tiers of lotus clusters. These flat pieces have pointed tops or hem derived from the Sanskrit word hema meaning gold or hima (meaning snow).

The background of this architectural feature is based on Indian mythology. It is the Hima, a peak called the Kailas or Kailasa, where Lord Siva is supposed to dwell. This Himalaya mountain is referred to in Siamese as Hemabanphot (from hemaparbata, the golden mountain, so called because of the gold-like glitter of its snow).

Besides, there are other types of Phra Chedi. One is the Northern type which is formed by a cubical solid mass having four niches at its sides containing images of the Buddha in high relief or round relief. This cubical mass superimposed by one or more

storeys and is crowned by the domed stupa. If the stupa is hollow, then one of the niches serves as the entrance door.

On the other hand, there is another type of Phra Chedi resembling the Sat Mahal Prasada at Polonnaruva in Ceylon. Its features constitute many receding cubical storeys enriched with horizontal rows of standing Buddha images in high relief. This type of Phra Chedi is found in the north of Thailand.

## The Pra Prong

Then there is the second type of Thai stupa called the Pra Prong. This architectural structure is a direct descendant of the tower of the Khmer temples,[44] which as we know originated from the sikharat of the temples of Northern and Southern or Dravidian styles of India. From the artistic point of view the Thai Pra Prang originated from the corner tower of the Khmer temple, which later became a new form of Thai stupa. Contrary to the Phra Chedi which is round in plan, the Phra Prong is square reminiscent of its Hindu origin. The Phra Prang is square in plan and domical in roofing. It rises elegantly from large base to an elliptical shape with a very fine outline. As usual, it has three niches and one entrance door reached by means of a very steep staircase. The interior contains images of the Buddha.

44. Ferogi, Prof.: Op. Cit., p. 159.

The classic Phra Prang has its own architectural features as it is formed by a very high basement, more than one third of its total height and a domical superstructure which is the real cell enshrining a Buddha image. Like the Phra Chedi of the later period, the Phra Prang has four cells, one giving access to the small chapel and the other three containing Buddha images. We reach the entrance cell by a very steep and narrow staircase.[45]

The development stage of Thai Phra Prang started from about the end of the 17th century A.D. onwards. Its shape started degenerating because of two causes:

1. Due to the inclusion of the structure into too slender a space in order to give too much prominence to the basement, thus reducing sensibly the space of the cell of the Phra Prong;

2. Due to the replacement of the old architectural moulding with "S" shaped lion-leg of the Chinese low table.

## The Mondop

The Mondop is one of the Thai developed religious architectures. Its architectural feature, strange to say, resembles the Mondopa of the Indian temples. It may have received the style directly from the Indian source.

45. Department of Fine Arts: Op. Cit., p. 43.

It is the planned square cubical structure, which may be plain or have a range of pillars around it. Its superstructure is a curved pyramidal mass formed by many low domical roofs superimposing each other and having a slender pinnacle as a finial, called Yot in the Siamese language. Each layer of the roof is decorated with the universal ornament, called Song. In Ban Taleng we can trace the window of the old Indian Buddhist Chaitya or the Indian cell which has the same window shape.

In fact, the old Buddhist Indian Vihara with its various stages and cells around it seems to have been the very prototype of the superstructure of Indian Hindu monuments as well as those of the countries which adopted Indian culture and art. The Thai Mondop thus originated directly from the Mondopa of temples of Northern India.

But the special feature of the Mondopa is that its wooden superstructure is decorated with wooden carvings gilded and enriched with glass mosaic. This mosaic is applied also over the vertical sides of the pillars. By combining, two or three different coloured glasses, ornamental designs are composed.[46] The function of the Mondop was to enshrine holy Buddhist objects as in the case of the Mondop of Saraburi Province enshrining the foot-print of Lord Buddha. Some-

46. Ferogi, Prof.: Op. Cit. p. 32.
Cf. Fergusson, James.: Op. Cit. p. 40.

times it also served as a kind of library and store-room for objects used in religious ceremonies.

## The Pra Sat

The Pra Sat, or a castle in English, is one of the Thai atrchitectural buildings meant either for religious or secular purposes. This structure is the direct descendant of the Greek-Cross planned Kmer temple, composed of a square sanctuary with its domical sikhara and the four porch-like ante-chambers attached to the side of the cell.

It is interesting to note that these ante-Chambers projecting from the main body of the building have two different elements — one formed by the mass attached to the stalls of the cell and the other formed by the portal. If we observe the outline minutely, we can see that the different heights of these two elements are designed as a step-like contour. In the timber roof of the Siamese building the stepped outline is still more noticeable on account of the addition of projecting masses and also on account of superimposed layers of the roof.

The Thai Pra Sat has other architecturcal features, besides the above mentioned element, which is formed in plan by a square central room with three projecting long wings and one short or the four wings of the same length.[47]

47. Department of Fine Arts: Op. Cit., p. 47.

There are two distinct forms of timber superstructure of the Thai Pra Sat. One retains the traditional sikhara of the Hindu temple as the finial of the roofs in this type are for the sake of tradition. The sikhara, which formerly was structural, has become a mere decorative part of the building. The other superstructure has the same form and same ornaments as that of the mondop. It has many superimposed horizontal low storeys, and at about one-third of the total height of this elaborated roof, a vertical element is formed which looks like a conventional stupa ending in a very high, thin pinnacle.

The function of Pra Sat was twofold. It served as the royal throne hall and contained some venerated objects.

## The Ho Trai

The Ho Trai is also one of the Thai architectural buildings. It is the library where the Buddhist sacred books are kept. The general architectural feature of some of Ho Trai is that it has a basement built with brick and the room with wood, while others have the ground room with brick and a wooden room over it. Usually the Ho Trai has no interior decoration, but some of them have fine paintings on the walls, windows and door panels.

The Ho Trai are formed by three parallel attached rooms, each room having a proper roof. The inner

sides of the roofs of the right and left rooms join the slopes of the central one and the water of the four slopes is received by two gutters. Two or three rooms are sometimes attached to each other with separated roofs, which seem quite logical because by roofing each room the Thai artist avoided building a large and high roof which hard to span the total breadth. In this case the lower part of the building would appear too small in comparision with the roof.

## The Sala

The Sala is an open pavilion used for resting. UsuaIly rectangular in plan, it is erected over four wooden or brick pillars supporting the architrave over which rests the step roof. From the level of the architraves an eave is applied around the Sala to widen the shade. Some salas have more architectural complexity on account of two projecting additions along the longitudinal sides of their rectangular plan, forming in this way a cross plan. In general, this kind of sala have no pyramidal superstructure, but some of them, such as the salas at the royal summer residence of Bang Pa In Palace near Bangkok, have the universal pyramidal roof. The salas are meant for secular use and are built along road or canals, where people used to pass by and rest for a while. In tropical countries where the climate is extremely hot, it is a relief for the passersby to seek shelter in them.

## Ho Rakhang and Kuti (Sangarama)

The belfry in Thai religions architecture has its ordinary form and there is no definite type of the Thai belfry known as the Ho Rakhang in the Siamese language,[48] Ho Rakhang is to be found in every Wat or monastery in the country. The simplest architectural feature of the Thai belfry is constituted by four wooden pillars on the top of which there is what looks like a small temple. Others are built of brick and have a high platform with steps in one or four sides. Over this platform, there is four-pillared pyramidal roofed small building in which the bell is suspended. The roof of the Ho Rakhang is covered with a coat of plaster or covered with glazed tiles. Inside, it contains the bell to announce the time in the morning and evening.

The Kuti or Sangarama, as a religious rule, is attached to the monastery or Wat. There are also many small buildings which together are called Kuti for residence of Buddhist monks only. The Kuti has no particular architectural attraction. It is a series of buildings containing one, two or three cells — or a long building with many cells in a row for the residence of the monks. The kuti is separated from the Wat by a wall or a fence or a canal. Sometimes, it has a verandah in front of it.

48. The Thai word for the belfry, Ho means structure or building while Rakhang means a bell.

In Thai Buddhist art, we can see that this architectural feature was for from the old fashioned style of the pre-Thai art. No doubt those architectural features of Thai art were evolved by the Thai people, but they also show the influence of Indian architecture. The art of North Thailand started from the Chiengsaen school of art and continued up to our period. In the Bangkok school of art, we can see the appearance of this developed stage of Thai architecture. But this Thai architecture with its definite style was clearly visible in a perfect style during the Ayudhya period, which formed the second capital of Thailand (A.D. 1350–1767). It reflourished during the Bangkok period (18th–20th century A.D.) and is continuing till the present day.

## The Development of Sculpture in Buddhist Art of Thailand

Contrary to other Buddhist people, who represented in sculpture legendary or mythical stories, the Thai people confined their sculpture to creating bronze, stucco and stone Buddha Images and other Buddhist divinities and ornamental works carved in wood or modelled in stucco for decorating religious structures. The Thais created an extremely beautiful type which we consider as one of the most perfect artistic expressions of the Eastern art. In respect of Thai ornaments,

they seem to convey the very luxuriant character of their tropical vegetation. In this the Thais were directly inspired by the exuberant nature of their country, which seems to vibrate with the joy of eternal life.[49] The artists of Thailand have concentrated on making Buddhist sculpture since the time of their first arrival in this country up to this day for more than 1,300 years. These sculptures are by now so numerous that they far outnumber the human population. With such an enormous production it is hardly to be expected that all examples would be worthy to be called works of art. Besides, the motives for making them were quite different fron the motives of artists in the west. From an old-fashioned Thai point of view, the sculptures were made to be worshipped and to give solace and protection, but from the point of view of the Modern Buddhists, they are simply "reminders of the Doctrine".

Artistic considerations were secondary and the traditional Buddhist image-maker had no desire to be original. When he showed originality it was in spite of himself. He always took pride in being a faithful copyist though not neccessarily an accurate copyist in the Western sense. He had to reproduce certain features and attitudes that were deemed essential, but not neccessarily the outward similarity. The development of sculpture in Thai Buddhist features which the Thai artist reproduced in their sculptural pro-

49. Silpa Bhirasri, Prof.: Thai Buddhist Sculpture, p. 3.

ductions, chief among which was the "supernatural anatomy".

Generally speaking the main features of the developed stage of Thai sculpture are the dress of the Buddha images and other Buddhist divinities as well as the monastic robe. The robe may be worn in the "covering" mode, that is, draped over both shoulders or in the "open" mode leaving the right shoulder exposed.

Four postures (iryapatha) were deemed suitable:

1. Walking
2. Standing
3. Sitting; and
4. Reclining.

If in the sitting posture, there are three different ways in which the legs of the Buddha may be placed. One is the European fashion (pralambanasana) which is the ordinary pose of a person sitting in a chair. The other is the "Hero" posture (virasana) with the legs folded, one lying on top of the other. And, lastly the adamantive posture (vajrasana) with the legs crossed in such a manner that each foot rests on the opposite thigh, the soles turned upward.

As regards the hand-position of Thai Buddhist sculpture in its developed stage, the most common hand-positions for standing or walking figures of the Buddha are dispelling fear (abhhaya mudra) with the

palm of the hand forward and the fingers pointing upward, and "giving instruction" (vitorka) which is similar but with the thumb and forefinger joined. For the seated image, the position of meditation is most popular. The meditiation mudra is called samadhi or jhana and its feature is both hands lying in the lap, palms upward.

The other position is "calling the Earth to witness" (bhumisparsa), otherwise known as the "victory over Mara" (Maravijaya). This posture is like meditation, except that the right hand of the Buddha Image has been moved over and placed on the right leg at or near the knee, with fingers pointing downward.

Thus, these are the essentials of the development in the field of sculpture in the Buddhist art of Thailand including the several styles of representation of Buddhist sculpture in different periods.

## Some aspects of Thai Stucco Decoration

The stucco decoration on the Buddhist monuments of Thailand has been little studied — undeservedly so, for apart from its beauty, stucco ornament can furnish valuable chronological clues. If we take a few isolated examples of Thai stucco decoration and compare them with each other, especially examples of similar designs, we might begin to understand some of the principles of their composition and begin to establish some of the evolutionary trends. That is what has been

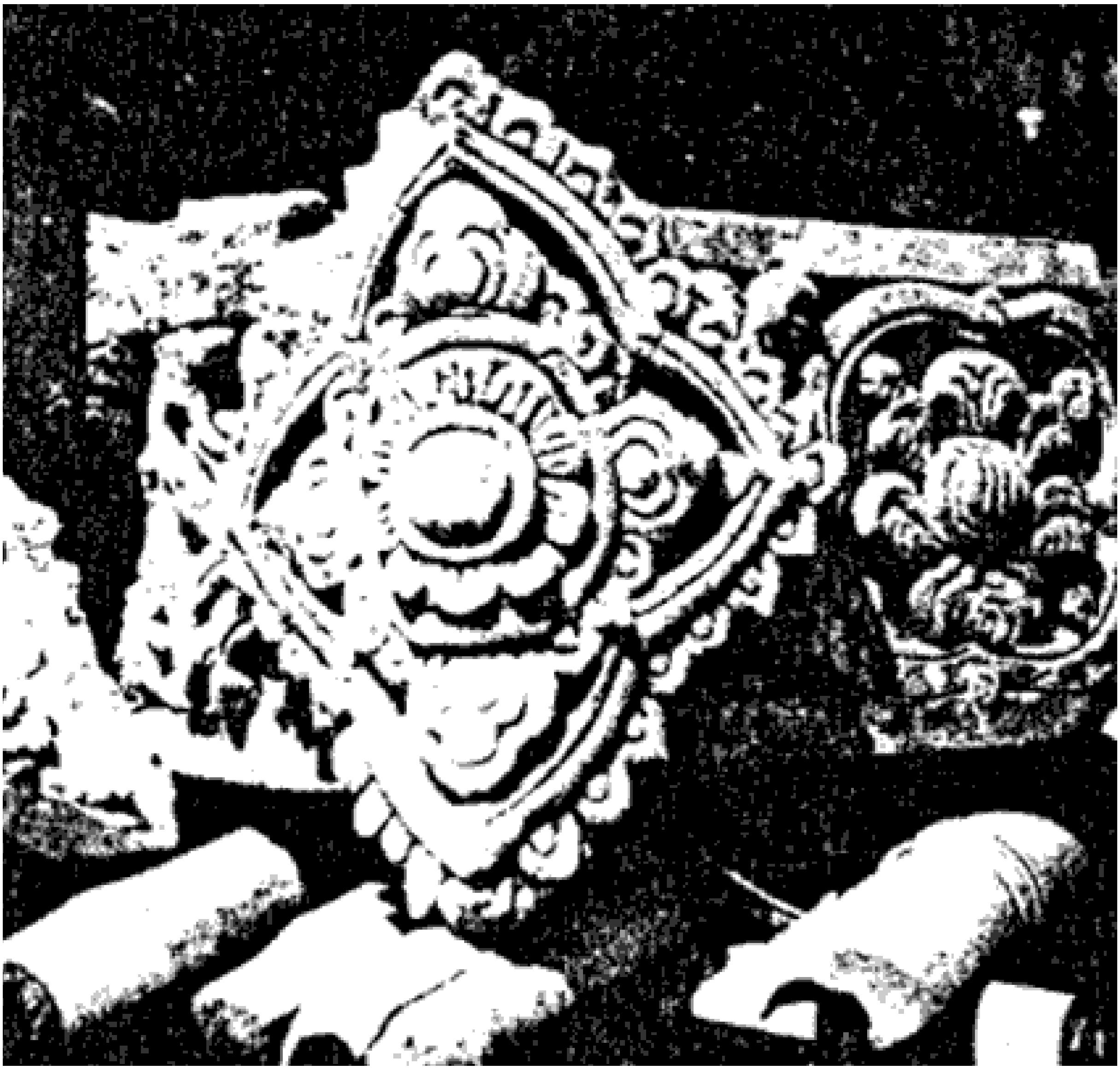
done in this article, with the hope that some of the suggestions might stimulate further research.

Stucco can last a long time; the stucco decoration on Preah Ko at Roluos, for instance, dates from the late ninth century, but it seldom does so intact. Nevertheless in Thailand human destructiveness has probably brought more loss than any natural agent. Although stucco is an endurable material, monuments abound in Thailand in which all or part of the decoration consists of restoration, so that the ornament is not always a reliable guide to the date of the building. On the other hand, the restoration of a stupa in Thailand has often meant enclosing the original in an entirely different form; in such instances, of course, the stupa and its decoration can be considered contemporary.

Some of the examples of decoration discussed here are representations of a flower, called the breastclasp flower after the Thai term of "Prachamyam", which is the name for the clasp on the bands of cloth that diagonally cross the chest in the classical dance costume and elsewhere; and for this flower design whenever it appears in ornament. The second Thai name is used when the breastclasp flower is used as a corner bracket (Fig. 46). The breastclasp flower is still widely used, often in a form quite close to that of the first example here, which is it drawing of such a flower found on the base of the Buddha of Grahi, dated 1183 A.D. In the center is it circular form sur-

rounded by rays suggestive of stylized petals. Outside a border are four major leaves or petals at the cardinal points, the spaces between being filled by forms suggesting smaller leaves or petals. The leaf petals, which do not have any representational connection with the central flower, are intended to consist of more than one layer.

**Fig. 46**



Stucco bracket, Wat Pasak, Chiengsen. First part of the fourteenth century (Photo by Khien Yimsiri)

1. **Wat Pasak, Chiengsen**: This wat is not well-known. It is it "cetiya-prasada" raised high on terraces, and its stucco decoration ranks among the most beautiful in Thailand. It probably dates from the first part of the fourteenth century.

The basic character of the ornament can be ascertained by looking at a corner bracket or breastclasp (Fig. 46) In basic form it is similar to the breastclasp on the Buddha of Grahi, but it is less stylized and more suggestive of natural forms. An outstanding characteristic is its suggestion of plumpness. All the parts, the leaves and petals, have a globular quality. The forms are visualized three-dimensionally; there is undercutting, and incisions bring out the plasticity and three-dimensionality of the parts. The craftsman who made this bracket made use of a basic aesthetic device — the contrast of a non-repeating form such as a circle, which "concentrates of itself", with a number of small, repeating forms. Here the non-repreating forms are the two inner concentric bands or borders, and the repeating forms are the petals. The circles seem at once to suppress the petals and to give birth to them, and in the tension between these two sorts of matter there is undeniable sensuous appeal. In the floral motif on the right-hand side, plasticity is even more evident, for the stucco makes us remember that it is a substance that has been rolled and squeezed.

The Kala heads, Garudas, Nagas, Makaras and lions still left at Wat Pasak have the same characteristics, but in greater degree. In a lion at the base of one of the outside jambs on the false cells (Fig. 47), there is of course no question of lack of three dimensionality. The stylized mane that hangs down on the chest has a function somewhat like that of the petals in the bracket. The modeling of various parts and the use of incesion in the eyeball and eyelid, for instance, emphasize the plastic, palpably globular quality of the flesh. The foliate frame has tremendous movement and vigor and is intended to contrast with the lion's smooth chest. Its sensuous impact, apart from its vital rhythms, is a result of the same means employed in the bracket the alternation of long curves with the multible plastic blobs, of petals, terminal foliage or groups of knobs.



**Fig. 47**

Stucco lion, Wat Pasak,
Chiengsen
(Photo by Khien Yimsiri)

It may be asked, considering the architectural source of Wat Pasak, whether the stucco decoration can be traced to Sri Vijaya. There is no stucco decoration of the Sri Vijaya period now existent in Southern Thailand. There are some Indonesian echoes in some of the designs, however, and it may eventually be possible to trace links and affinities.

2. **Wat Nang Phya, Sri Satchanalai**; The laterite walls of the vihara at Wat Nang Phya still stand; on the pilaster-shaped balustrades and on adjacent parts of the wall much of the applied stucco decoration still remains. The vihara, stupa and stucco at Wat Nang Phya probably date from the middle of the fifteenth century although there is some possibility that the decoration is not nearly so old.

Photo by Srisak Vallibhotama

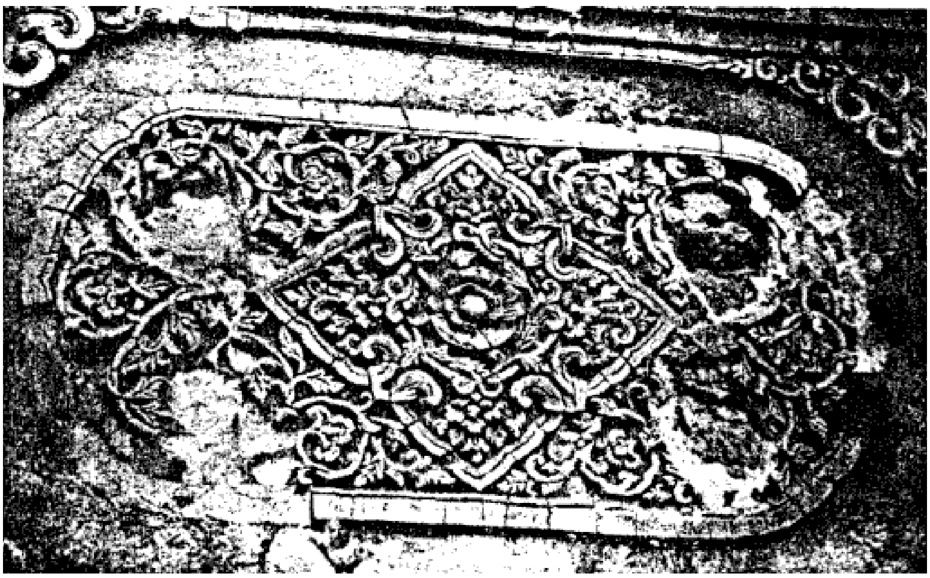


**Fig. 50**

Stucco decoration at Wat Nang Phya, Sri Satchanalai, probably middle of the fifteenth century

A detail of a section of the stucco decoration below the window is sufficient for us to grasp the main characteristic. The section illustrated here (Fig. 50) is inciden-

tally one that has been vandalized since another photograph was taken a few years ago. This floral and foliate design is arranged quite differently from that on the Wat Pasak bracket. In the first place the stucco at Wat Nang Phya is applied to background; it is a two-dimensional design not one built up in depth without need for a background. The use incision is a good example of this. Whereas incisions in the Wat Pasak are intended to suggest the globular mass of the different parts, the incisions at Wat Nang Phya are intended to catch the light and to give textural variety. The incisions do not seem to curve into the material, they are gouged out, leaving nothing hidden from the eye. The Wat Nang Phya design is composed of lines that move out of the background and send off leaves of secondary importance. There is some tension and harmony in the design as a result of the opposing tendencies of these lines — first, to pull in and curve in, second, to seek freedom. Thus we see clasps holding the volute-ended 'V's together, and leaves spreading out at the cardinal points from the intertwined vine that surrounds the central flower. Whether or not it is historically related, a motif found on one of the engraved slabs in Wat Sri Chum makes an instructive comparison (Fig. 48). The comparison underscores the Singhalese character of the engravings, which probably date from the early Sukhothai period. The forms not only organically emanate from each other, they also

push and pull against each other. The Wat Nan Phya design lacks this feeling of growth and, despite the medium does not seem so deep.

**Fig. 48**



Detail of engraved slab at Wat Sri Chum, Sukhothai
(Drawing by Prungsri Bejrabiruna after Fournereau,
Le Siam ancien. vol II, pl. XXVII

3. **Wat Culamani, Pitsanulok**: According to the Luang Prasert version of the Annals of Ayudhya, King Paramaitraloka-nathi built the vihara of Wat Culamani in C.S. 826 (1465 A.D.) and became a monk there the following year. There is a late Khmer or Lopburi laterite structure at Wat Culamani, and it seems reasonable to date the stucco decoration on it from 1465 also. The designs have a number of points in common with those on Wat Nang Phya, but Wat Nang Phya probably predates the Wat Culamani stucco decoration by a few years.

If we look at just one example of the stucco decoration on Wat Culamani, the idea stikes us that when King Paramatrailokanatha restored the laterite shrine, he intended to do so in Khmer style. He asked a local

artisan, however, to do the job. The design illustrated (Fig. 51), with the leaf-shaped motifs separated by flowers on stalks, is of Khmer origin it is found, for instance, on the walls at Pimai — but the execution is that of an artisan who had been trained in a Wat Nang Phya kind of style. At both Sri Satchanalai and Pitsanulok there is the same two-dimensional quality, a similar use of incision to define texture, and similar ribbon-like outlines. There is even more background visible at Wat Culamani. The design is both looser and more restrained. An evolutionary trend can be detected in the foliate frame at Wat Culamani; it is comparable to the volute ended 'V's at Wat Nang Phya and to the outermost band on the Wat Pasak bracket. In years to come the trend from a single curve to multiple, increasingly deep crenellation was to culminate in the wildly convoluted frames that can today be found all over the North.

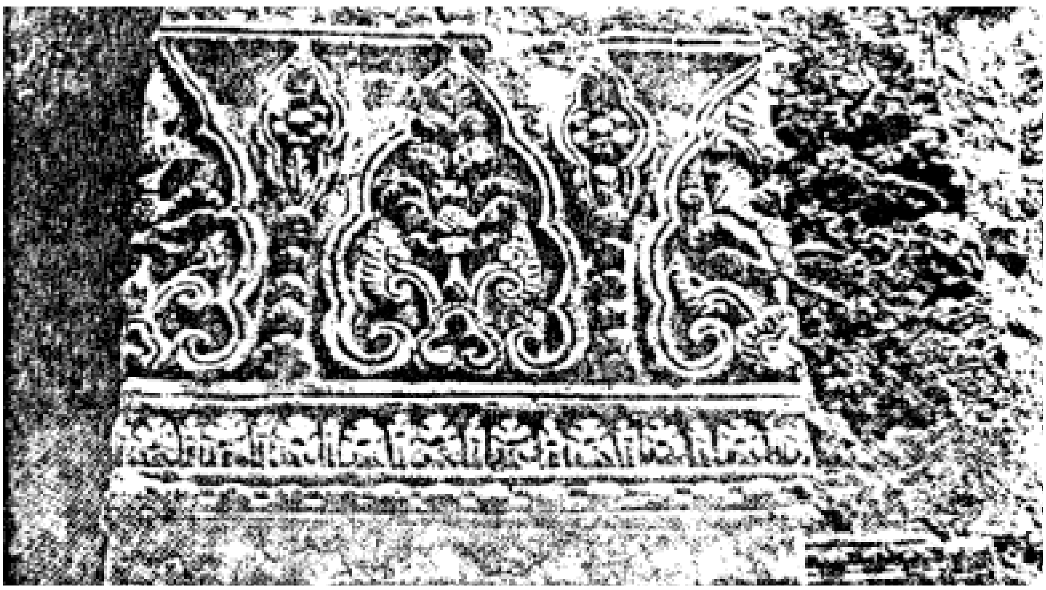
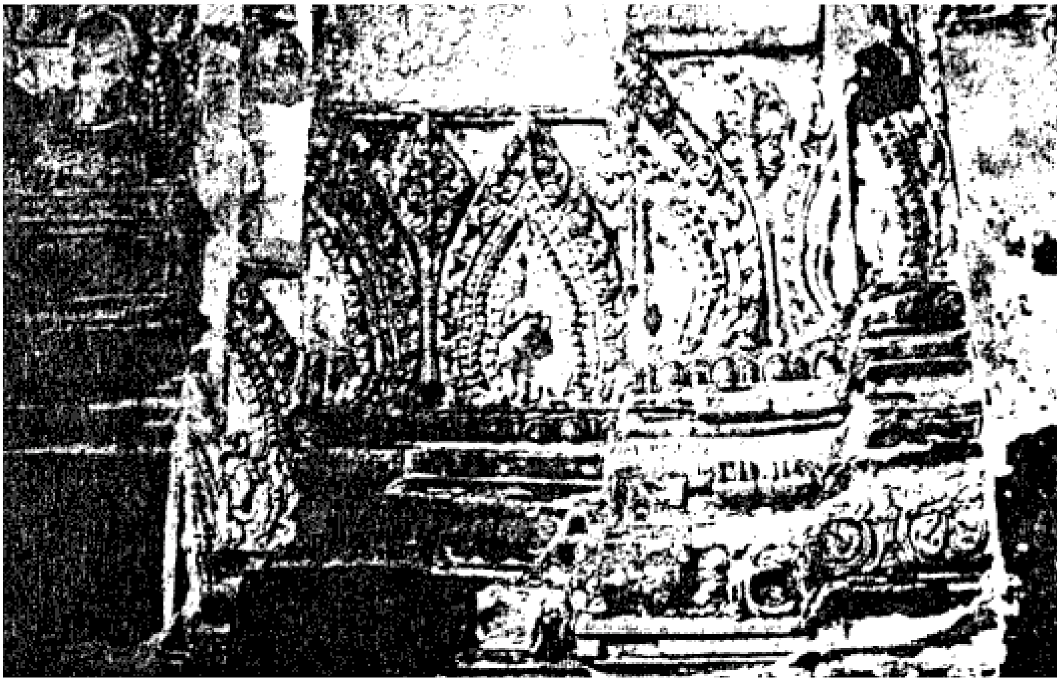


**Fig. 51**

Stucco on shrine at Wat Culamani, Pitsanulok, 1465 (?)
(Photo: Fine Arts Department)

On Wat Mahadhatu in Lopburi there are two forms of this decorative motif. One (Fig. 49), presumably part of a restoration carried out during the Ayudhya sphere of influence. Instead of becoming more and more linear, the forms here have broken up into taut vibrating spirals. The forms do exist in space, but no single form is allowed to have much mass. The repetition of the spirals and of the other motifs makes a light nervous pattern. This is the Siamese tradition that has continued into modern times.

**Fig. 49**



Stucco at Wat Mahadhatu, Lopburi, Ayudhya period (Photo by author)

4. **Phra That Chom Kitti, Chiengsen**: This monastery is one of the most venerable in Chiengsen, and one legend even states that it was founded in 406 A.D.[50] According to the Ginakalamali, it was founded in

50. G. Notton, Annales du Siam, p. 194.

C.S. 795, 1433 A.D.[51] The present structures are not so old as this, however; it might be the structure the Singhanawati Kumara says was built in C.S. 1073 (1711 A.D), or it may be even newer. It is a cetuja-prasada in which the spire has been simplified into geometric, angular shapes, giving the structure a certain grace and lightness.

Before looking at a Phra That Chom Kitti bracket, we ought to look at a sixteenth century breastclasp flower on the crown of a Buddha image dated 1541.[52] This image, now in the National Museum, Bangkok, was probably made somewhere in the Sukhothai region. The design, framed by a lozenge, consists of lines and beads, the parts have become separated, and the four outer "leaves" have more, and deeper, crenellation.

At Phra That Chom Kitti these trends are continued. The outside lozenge is retained. The design is flatter and more linear than ever, and there is a greater proportion of background visible than ever before. We are struck at how remote the parts have become from each other. At Wat Pasak a single ring separated the inner flower from the outside petals; here there are two double bars and a row of knobs that make an inner lozenge. Although the outside "leaf frames" are not full of

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51. G. Coedes, Documents surl Historire politique et religieuse du Laos Occidental, BEFEO, 25, p. 107.

52. M. C. Subhadradis Diskul, "A Dated Crowned Image from Thailand," 24, 3/4, pp. 409–416.

convolutions in this example, some of the larger frames are. The single breaks; moreover, are deep ones.

## Introduction of Painting in Buddhist Art of Thailand

There are very few traces of painting in the early Buddhist art in this country during he first three pre-Thai periods of Dvaravati, Sri-Vijaya and Lopburi. But, in the real Thai Buddhist art of the period, artistic activities also included the art of painting as the main branch of Buddhist art.

The painting of Thailand is an art of great interest and sometimes of remarkable beauty. Thai painting, though it must have been originally derived from the Buddhist painting of India and Ceylon,[53] became so well adopted to local thoughts, needs and materials that by the time of its greatest popularity, in the 18th and 19th centuries it must have been considered as original and unique art of this country. Only by subject matter and superficial generalities can it be connected with the painting of other Buddhist countries.

These paintings, like the early religious art of any other faith, have a basic purpose to instruct, guide

53. The Buddhist painting of Ajanata Cave is near Arurangabad in India and Srikiriya or Sigiri Hill in Ceylon are the prototype of wall-paintings in Thailand.

and inspire the devout by illustrating scenes of religious history, or of moral value. As a rule, painting in Thailand was principally used for religious purposes and particularly to decorate the bots and viharas and temples.

There are several different forms of traditional painting in Thailand. The most important type is the dry fresco mural found in one or more of the buildings. Another type of painting is a long cloth banner and koi paper. One or more of these are displayed in the monastery on special occasions. But the paintings on cloth or koi paper parallel the style and development of the mural paintings although they did not often match them in quality.[54]

Another form of Thai painting is the manuscript illustrations, which represent an important category of painting. The materials of manuscript illustrations are the long, narrow palm leaf books used for many centuries in Thailand. The usual illustrated manuscript is called in Thai a Samut Thai which means, Thai book or paper. This manuscript is not only taken from palm-leaf, but from Koi paper[55] in its one continuous sheet folded like an accordion. It is read across the length of the page.

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54. Lyons, Elizabeth: Thai Traditional Painting, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 20, p. 4.

55. Koi is the name of plant usually grown in Thailand and other tropical countries. It is a plant of the family of Urticaceae.

This form of painting, available before the Bangkok period, usually has a large illustration in the middle of the page, sometimes covering the double unfolded section. But the manuscripts of koi-paper during the Bangkok period generally have one or two smaller illustrations at the ends of the page with the text between them. The subject-matter of the manuscripts illustrating painting is extremely ecclesiastic. Although the majority are devoted clearly to religious works, others are treatises on the real or legendary worlds of human beings and animals and other secular texts.

Thus the mural wall painting, painting on cloth and manuscript painting on koi-paper represent the largest part and most important aspect of Thai painting. The other examples of painting forms play at subsidiary role although to class them as merely "decorative" is rather arbitrary. This is especially true of the guardian figures painted on the inner side of the doors and the window shutters of buildings.

## The Characteristics and Technique of Thai Paintings

The style and technique of Thai paintings have the basic elements of all Asian painting — with no shadows and timeless. There is no Western perspective with its fixed view and vanishing point. Here, the

spectator of the painting is allowed to rove through the painting. They may stand directly in front of an audience hall or he may look down from a height into its courtyard, and they may do both at the same time if it seems necessary for the story. Distance is an illusion achieved by the relative placement or overlapping of figures and objects.

The composition of painting is a combination of mass and line. The figures are drawn with an even, flowing contour and then filled in with flat colour. The details and ornaments are added in a manner which is similar to the Indian and early Islamic technique. The figures of buildings, furniture, chariots etc. are done in the same way but the background is a very generalized landscape. Here and there, a group of rocks or a clump of flowers show the Chinese influence in the style.

The artist prohably copied and adopted those bits from porcelain or decorative screens popular at the time. The artist does not consider landscape as important by itself. It is only incidental setting for the action, and is often done in a very summary fashion. In some cases, the contrast between an uninspired or crude background and the sensitive, intricate figures leads one to believe that the former was done by pupils or lesser artists.

In the narrative murals or frescoes there is a type of continuous action although the scenes do not merge into one another. The important episodes are separated in the early examples by an arbitrary zigzag line,

and in the later period by more natural means such as a row of trees, a wall or a screen.

The technique of Thai painting has some unusual painting materials. For mural painting, the wall of the structure, bot, vihara and other religious buildings is prepared by washing it several times with water in which ki-lek leaves have been pounded.[56] This is supposed to remove any trace of salt. Then a coating of plaster, white chalk mixed with a binder of tamarind seeds which have been backed, ground and boiled, is applied and carefully smoothed. Cloth and paper are sized with a thin application of the same mixture.

The paints are of mineral and earth pigments like malachite and cinnabar. From the beginning of the 18th century at least, they have been imported from China in powder form. The duller and more limited colours of the earliest painting are probably local pigments as is the red ochre always used for the paints is a tree gum, named ma-kwit in Thai language.[57] Another gum is from ma-due tree (Ficus hispida urticaceae) used its a glue for the gold leaf. The paint is applied to the dry plaster. Thus, it is not a true fresco technique.

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56. Ki-lek leaves or tree are a kind of local Thai plant of the genus cassia.

57. Ma-Kwit is also name of a local Thai tree. It is the same as the wood apple or elephant apple, Ma-dua is genus of leaf grass.

The implements for the Thai artist consisted of brushes made of tree roots and bark, afterwards they had elaborate silver handles. The brush of lamjiek root[58] (pandanus tectoriaes) is cut flat across the end and then split several times. This produces a stippling effect which is used for trees and shrubbery masses. Another brush is made of gradangngu[59] (cunajium odoratum) flowers which peels off in long flukes. The ends of this are pounded and frayed, and both brushes are well soaked in water to make them pliable before use.

The details of painting are added with brushes which are made of cow's hair, and exceptionally fine work may be done with a special brush made of hair taken from the inner part of a cow's ear.

Much of the distinctive appearance of Thai painting is due to the wooden brushes. They give an even wire-line, often of amazing sinuosity, and quite unlike the modelling line of the flexible Chinese brush.

The colours used in Thai painting, according to the old Thai tradition of painting, are the colours called Nam ya or painted water. These colours are taken from earth and earth-powder as well as colours from differ-

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58. The Thai word applied for local Thai tree. It is the screw pine with beautiful flowers.

59. The Thai word applied for a particular kind of local Thai tree with its smelling flowers. It is a climbing plant or the ilang-ilang.

ent plants. Nam Ya or completed colours are mixed with gum or paste. The utensil used to put the mixture of gum and colour is the coconut shell or pottery-bowl.

There are several colours used in Thai painting; yellow taken from the gum of rong plant; red colour taken from the red ochre earth from the cliff or the road; white taken from white earth-powder; green from green-stone, blue colour taken from the boiled leaves of a green tree and the black colour taken from the lampblack.

The subject matter of Thai paintings consisted of several illustrations from many stories and literature. Chief of the subject matter to be painted, no doubt, were the religious subjects and stories, scenes from Lord Buddha's life and the narrative story of Buddhist divinity called the Jataka stories (Chadok in Thai). The Jataka is made up of episodes of the Buddha's previous births. The illustration of painting of the Jataka stories, no doubt, has the aim to closely resembling the subject-matter of Buddhist painting of Ajanta caves in India. There are 547 Jataka stories, which are a mine of subject-matter for the Buddhist painters in Thailand.

These stories recount the previous lives of Lord Buddha as man or animal and illustrate his path to Enlightenment. Especially, the last ten Jatakas or Chadok stories are used for teaching; and as the main subject-matter for Thai painting from remote times up to the present day. These ten Jatakas, known as the

Tosachat (the ten Births of the Buddha), illustrate the virtues by which the future Buddha perfected himself and thus finally achieved Enlightenment. Tosachat stories from Jataka are offered primarily as a guide to the subject-matter of Thai paintings. Many of the great murals can be enjoyed from the artistic point of view for their colour and composition but some knowledge of the stories would add to a greater dimension of understanding pleasure.[60]

The subject-matter of Thai painting does not deal only with the Jataka story but also other religious subjects. It also illustrated the scenes or episodes from famous Hindu epics and literature particularly the Ramayana epic of Rishi Valmiki. Thai paintings, as well as the Khon or classical Thai dramatic art have taken their subject-matter from the story of Ramayana epic. The theme is taken from the part of the epic called Ramakien in Thailand. The fantasy and force of expression of the ancient Thai artist had no limit. Indeed the painted army of the spirited monkeys of Rama, the hero of the story, and the opposing army of the rakshas or demons of Ravana (or Tasakanth in Thai) fighting each other are exceptionally alive.[61]

Other subjects of Thai painting are landscape trees, citadels, palaces and other structures, as also the

60. Lyons, Elizabeth: The Josachat in Thai Painting, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 22, p. 6.

61. For further detail: Yupho, Dhanit: The Khon, p. 4.

scenes of celestial and other mythological beings — Yakshas, Yakshini, devas, goddesses, kinnara and others. These illustrations are similar to the paintings at Ajanata Cave in India and the latter seem to be the prototype of Thai painting.

The paintings also deal with groups of architectural structures, human and animal figures wandering amidst forests, fields and groves which seem to convey the very Thai life in its natural order. To harmonize the scale between vegetation and living beings, the human figures were painted on a small scale, about 25–30 centimetres in height. Of course the subject of these paintings was related to Buddhism.

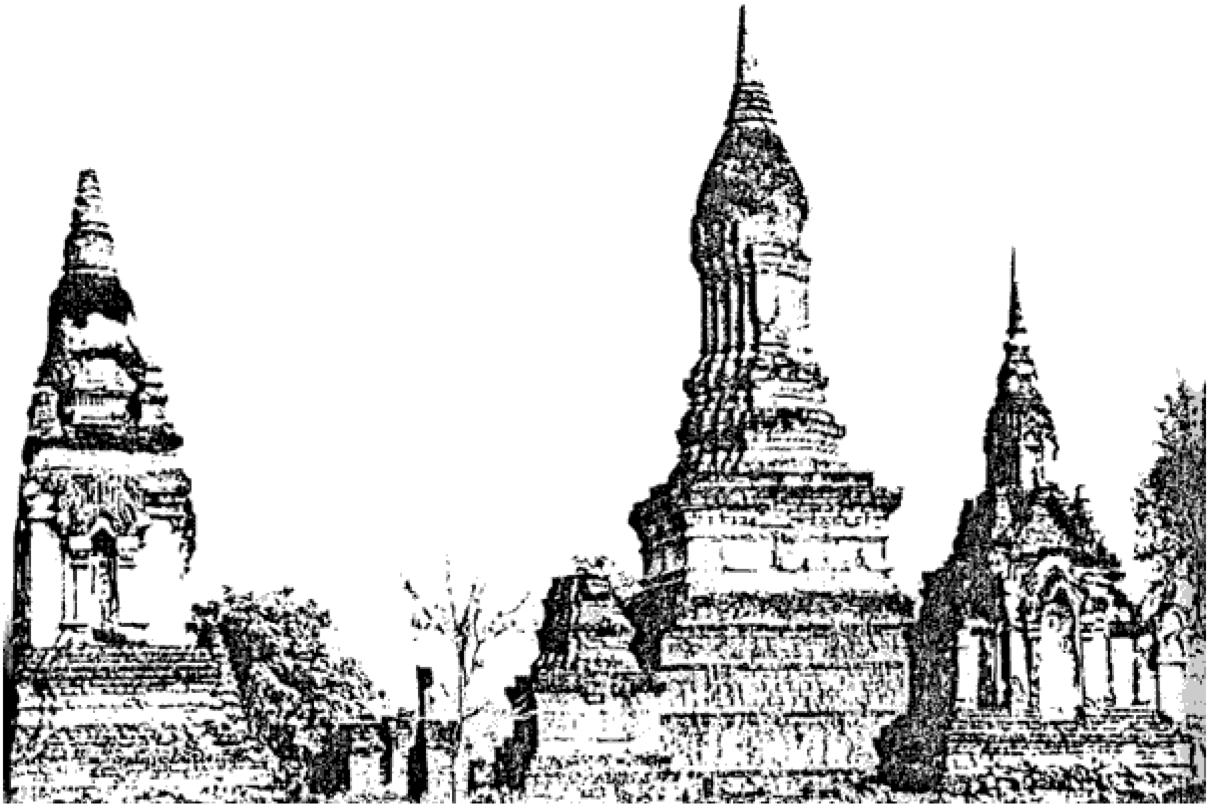
One important factor of Thai painting is that, like the theatrical arts, painted human figures suggest the meaning of their action. In Thai painting there are three kinds of style in representing human figures according to their rank.

The first style includes the illustrations of royal and celestial beings all of which are painted in classic style, wherein the artists have focused all their talent. Indeed these figures could not be more refined in lines, colours and expression. The dresses, crowns and jewellery of these figures are the same as those worn by the royalty of the past.

The second type includes the dignitaries and other royal attendants. These figures bear a distinctiveness proper to their ranks. Thirdly, the common people are

painted realistically and also their facial expressions are realistic. The artistic rendering of the figures of the common people did not show any improvement from the specimens painted on the books so far. Thai artists pictured their compositions according to the real surroundings. So besides being worthy of a high artistic value, these paintings are also a precious resource to learn the history of Thailand. Like architecture and sculpture, the traditional Thai painting belongs to the past and this makes more valuable the few specimens that still remain in the north of Thailand — the Ayudhya, Sukhothai and Bangkok periods which are unfortunately fading away day by day on account of the tropical dampness.

**Fig. 15**



The Original Sukhothai Stupa "Phum Khao Bin", Wat Chedi Chet Thaew, Sisatchamalai, Sukhothai Province, Architecture of Sukhothai Period



# Chiengsaen

# Chapter VI

## The Nature and Conception of Buddhist Arts of Thailand (in its different periods)

### The Art of Chiengsaen Period (Circa 11th–15th Century A.D.

The real Thai Buddhist art originated for the first time in the areas now comprising the present Thailand known as the Chiengsaen school of art which flourished from the latter part of the 11th century A.D., in the present Northern Thailand.

It is said that parallel with the Mon-Khmer kingdom in what are now Central and South Thailand, the Thai people, who had increasingly been moving southwards from their ancient home in South China, established their own kingdom in an area which forms part of the Northern region of this country. It was known as Chiengsaen and also as the Lan-na-thai kingdoms. The monuments and antiquities belonging to this period are known as Chiengsaen school of art.

Chiengsaen is the name of an ancient town of Thailand. It is situated on the right bank of the Mekong river in the vicinity of modern Chiengsaen Province of North Thailand.[62] Nowadays, Chiengsaen is one of the

62. The city of Chiengsaen was built by King Saenphu in the year 1328 A.D.

sub-districts of Chiengrai Province. However, the Buddhist art which originated in this ancient town had later spread over the whole area in the old kingdom of Lan-na-thai or Yonok.

This new school was not only confined to the ancient town of Chiengsaen, but included many other Northern Thai towns such as Chiengmai, Chiengrai, Lamphun and Lamphang. This art especially took its deep root in Northern part of this country in the Lan-na-thai kingdom at the city of Chiengmai which was the late capital of that kingdom. In the course of time, the Chiengsaen school spread far and wide, and spread downwards along the valley of the Mekong river up to the area which is now the modern Laos kingdom,[63] and to the north-eastern part of Thailand; this is supported by the Buddha Images of Chiengsaen period which bear the style of Laotian art.

Since the first centuries of the Christian Era, and maybe earlier, the Thai people migrated in successive waves into the Valley of the Menam river, intermingling with and absorbing the culture of the Mon-Khmer races, at that time sharing the dominion of modern Thailand. Later on the Thais consolidated themselves into several Thai principalities and all these states had their own chieftains.

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63. At that time, the area of modern Laos was called the Lanchang kingdom (meaning the kingdom of the million elephants) or the other name, Srisattanakanahut.

Later on, a new Thai chief re-consolidated the Thai dominion and established the independent Thai kingdom of Lan-na-thai or Yonok. This was King Prohm of the Singhanavat dynasty, the youngest son of King Punjaraj who became the first powerful Thai monarch. He destroyed the dominion and suzerainty of the Kmers in North Thailand. The king extended his kingdom's border as far as the area now located in present Laos kingdom — to Luang Prabang and other places. He built his new capital at Chaiprakarn. This king was followed by King Mengrai (1258–1317 A.D.) under whose reign the famous Chiengsaen school of art flourished.

The Chiengsaen school of art represents the real first Thai art having influence of Burmese art as well as Indian art of the Pala school. On the one hand, the Burmese Culture and artistic influences had mixed with the elements of Thai artistic activities and workmanship and on the other, the influence of Indian Buddhist art of the Pala period also played an important part in the Chiengsaen school of art.

It seems that both artistic productions owed their origin to one and the same style. Pala art and culture spread in Upper Burma in the 11th century A.D. through the activities of the Buddhist missionaries under the patronage of the Pala kings from the Nalanda University. King Aniruddha invaded North Thailand and took with him religious and artistic ele-

ments to that land. Thus, it is that the Mahayana faith and Burmese art, which in its essence bears the strong influence of the Pala school of art, spread to these areas. Geographically also it can be said that the Pala art in its new forms of Burmese artistic productions could easily reach north of Thailand through ancient land-routes. These were followed by the Indian settlers for going over to the various countries of South-East Asia.

**Architecture**

The architecture of Chiengsaen period has its peculiar features. It is said that. the Chiengsaen style of architecture belongs mainly to the time after King Maengrai who founded the town of Chiengmai in 1297 A.D. There is one greatly disputed monument of Chiengsaen style. It is Wat Chet Yot at Chiengmai (Seven-spired Temple). This temple was built in imitation of the Maha Vihara or Mahabodhi Temple at Pagan, Upper Burma, which was built in the early Atilominlo, a successor of King Aniruddha. This temple itself is an imitation of the famous Buddhist monument, Mahabodhi Vihara at Bodh-gaya in the state of Bihar in India. Thus we can see the close relationship between India (during the time of the Palas) and Burma as well as Thailand of Chiengsaen period in architecture.

Generally speaking Chiengsaen style of architecture in the form of Chedi or stupa has its self-characteristic in construction. Its architectural feature consisted of a large, high dome or body of structure. There are square-shaped corners above the body of temple decorated by bell-shaped dome of a stupa, in front of the stucture having the arch at the basement. The body of the structutre is like the body of a Bot or Vihara in Chiengsaen style. There are the two or three storeyed roofs of structure super-imposing each other. The successive superimposed storey-roofs, separated in two parts the body of Bot or Vihara. There is no window.

The uppermost roof is decorated by the Cho-Fa. These Cho-Fa or decorative designs of superstructure, are made of stucco in the form of the Naga head. The lower part of the Cho-Fa is also atttatched on the topmost of the roof. This lower part is called Bai Raka in Thai. The pediment of the monument is in the form of undecorated design. On the roof of the structure again, there are timber tiles and no gallery or covered roof in front of the building. The staircase of the temple or bot has the design of coiling body and raised hood of the Naga head. Inside the body of structure, there is no ceiling. When we enter it we can see clearly the inner wooden structure. The row of pillars on both sides of the structure can also be seen. This was necessary in order to support the beam (Fig. 13).



Temple of Wat Chet Yod: Chiengmai Province, Nothern Thailand, Architecture of Chiengsaen Period **Fig. 13**

The Mondop of Chiengsaen style of architecture is called in Northern Thai language as Ku. The architectural features of Ku consist of successive superimposed storeyroofs. The Ku or Mondop was used to house a Buddha Image. The trace of Burmese art on the

architecture is seen in Chiengsaen's architectural buildings at Wat Pra Yuen in Chiengmai province. This chedi or stupa is an imitation of the structure of Ananda chedi in Pagan, Lower Burma. It is a stupa of four niches in four directions with the standing Buddha Images inside the niches.

## Sculpture

Sculptures of this period contain the Buddhist element and conception. Chief among the sculpture is the production of Buddha Images carved by the artists on the basis of Hinayana and Mahayana elements. The sculpture of Buddha Images during this period can be divided into two classes according to its characteristics:

1. The early Buddha Image.
2. The Late Chiengsaen or Chiengmai Style.

The Early period shows the influence of Pata school of sculpture from India and the Late period shows the strong influence of Sukhothai art on sculpture, which flourished in North and Central Thailand in contemporaneity with the Chiengsaen style.

The Buddha Images of Early Chiengsaen style have the sculptural features derived from the image of the Pala school. The sculptural features of the Buddha Image in Early Chiengsaen style are as follows: The Buddhta's body is fat and round-shaped, along with a

round-shaped head and a round, short face. The Ketumala or protuberance on the head is in the form of a lotus-bud (ushnisha). The eyes are rather bulging and half-closed, looking downwards, with rather prominent lips, a small sharply-defined mouth and a highly sensitive nose or hooked-nose, the knotted-chin, arched and prominent eyebrows springing from the bridge in two long upward curves. There is no parting line round the topknot on the head and the prominent chest.

The pedestal of the Buddha image is in the form of a conventionalized lotus-pedestal. The petals of the lotus are large and flat, accompanied by small lotus-petals among the main large petal. The robe is lightly defined, leaving the right nipple bare, the short upper fold of robe coming down over the left shoulder ending above the left nipple in a sharp-pointed fork. The hair is composed of pronounced spired curls or shell-shaped, while the ketumala rises knob-like from the centre of the head, a lotus-bud covered with similar curls. The legs of the Buddha are crossed, with both soles of the feet upturned.

The general pose of the Buddha image in Early Chiengsaen style and later school of Thai art is the Bhumisparsa Mudra — the Buddha in the act of touching the Earth with his right hand, soliciting the Earth Goddess to witness the truth of his Enlightenment.[64] The Thais refer to such a posture as Sa dung Mara or

64. Silpa Bhirasri, Prof.: Thai Buddhist Sculpture, p. 26.

also as Mara Vijaya Mudra depicting the right hand touching over the foreleg the finger pointing downward to the earth, the left hand lying on the lap of crossed legs (Fig. 14)

**Fig. 14**

The Bronze Seated Buddha Image of Chiengsaen Style



Some of the Early Chiengsaen Buddha images have an elaborate ornamentation serving as a background to the image and in many instances figures of conventionalized lions or other animals intermingled with the

ornamental decoration appear on the pedestal of the Buddha image. This is typical, reminding us of its Indian origin (Pala art).

The Later Chiengsaen Buddha images show the influence of Sukhothai art and not the Pala influence like the Early group. The Late Chiengsaen group of sculpture is contemporary with the Sukhothai art during the latter part of the 13th century A.D. up to the middle of the 13th century. This was the peak period of Later Chiengsaen style of sculpture, which was largely influenced by the Sukhothai source which is classical Thai art.

The Buddha Image of the Late Northern group is characterised by smaller spiral curls of hair, with the parting line round the topknot. Other features on the body are the same as in the early group. But the robe of the Buddha, leaving the right nipple bare, comes down over the left shoulder and hangs down much lower than in the early group. Apart from this, the Later Chiengsaen type is to be recognised by the posture of the legs, which are, in this case, not crossed like that of the early group. The right foreleg, rests on the left one, which in Thai is called Samadhi Rab — a clear influence of the Sukhothai art.

The Late Chiengsaen style of sculpture spread to the towns of Luang Prabang, Vientiens and Champasak (Bassak) in Laos, but the workmanship of sculpture in these places cannot equal that in Northern Thailand.

## Painting

Paintings of Chiengsaen period are also quite a few in number. The painting of Northern Thailand in this period usually bear a strong Burmese influence. The drawing of Northern murals is somewhat less sensitive. The colour is much colder in tone and the general effect is dry and crisp, the murals are much less luxurious than those of the later school of painting.

The earliest painting on cloth was discovered in 1960 A.D. at Amphur or sub-district Hod, near Chiengmai. This painting is a long banner of cloth, about 7 inches by 4½ inches, folded into a clay jar and placed in the crypt of the Chedi of Wat Dokngoen (Silver Flower). This painting cloth illustrates the Buddha descending from Heaven (named Tavatimsa) in a shower of flower jewelry and silver nuggets, accompanied on either side by heavenly musicians, a group of disciples, royal personages and others. This style of painting on cloth contains elements from all the influences that must have penetrated Northern Thailand —Chiengsaen, Sukhothai and Sinhalese school. The date of the painting may be assigned to circa 15th century A.D.[65]

65. Lyons, Elizabeth: The Tosachat in Thai Painting, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 22, pp. 13–14.



# Sukhothai

# The Classical Art of the Sukhothai Period (13th–14th Century A.D.)

It is said that every important civilisation of the world has a Golden Age or a Classical Age when material, intellectual and spiritual progress simultaneously reaches a high level. Thus, the Sukhothai period was the Golden Age of Thailand and the determining factors were national independence and religion. The culture and artistic activities with regard to Buddhism reached their zenith during this period. Buddhist art in the Sukhothai period is regarded as the most beautiful. Original Thai art expression was especially in the field of sculpture. The Sukhothai period, in this respect, represents the Golden Age in the history of Thailand as the Gupta period was in the history of India.

Sukhothai is the name of the first historical powerful Thai kingdom whose capital was of the same name Sukhothai or Sukhothai (literally meaning "Happiness of the Thais").[66] Nowadays, Sukhothai is an important Province of the upper, central part of modern Thailand. The religion as well as the religious art of this kingdom reached its zenith in the time of the Sukhothai kingdom which came to be known in the history of Siamese art as "Sukhothai" art.

66. For details: Dumrong Rajanubhab., H. H. Prince,: Letters of Princes, Part 49, P. 57.

The period of the Sukhothai kingdom (1238–1439 A.D.) represents the great evolution of religion in this country. It witnessed the introduction of the new sect of Hinayana Buddhism. It was the pure Theravada Hinayana sect from Ceylon, also called the Sinhalese sect of Hinayana Buddhism. In Thai it is called Lankavong Nikaya (Nikaya meaning sect).

The Lankavong or Sinhalese Hinayana sect of Buddhism from Ceylon was first introduced in the Sukhothai kingdom, it still survives as the state religion of this country. The strong influence of Sinhalese art was imbibed by the Thai artists of the Sukhothai period in their artistic production and workmanship. The archaeological objects, however, point to the existence of some Brahmanic deities also during this period.

## Architecture

The Lankavong Theravada Hinayana sect of Buddhism constitutes the main source of Buddhist monumments in the Sukhothai period. There is a long series of constructions of Buddhist religious buildings with their perfect style, which became the prototype of later monuments in Thai art. Several forms of Buddhist monuments were erected during this period. They were wat or monastery, viharas, temple, stupa or Chedi, Phra Prang, bot, etc. All of them bear the influence of Sinhalese architecture, as well as the architectural features of early Thai Buddhist art such as the Khmer art of Lop-

buri and the Sri-Vijaya art of Southern Thailand.

Chief among the Sukhothai architectural achievements is the stupa or chedi. According to Thai scholars and archaeologists, the Chedi architecture of this period may be divided into three main types as follows:

**1. The Original Sukhothai Chedi.** It has three superimposed rectangular pedestals supporting and small and redented central part on the top of which is a finial in the form of a lotus-bud (called Phum-Khao-Bin in Thai language (Fig. 15). Such a Chedi exists at Wat Mahatat in the centre of the old town of Sukhothai, and at Wat Chedi Chet Thaew (the seven rows of stupa) in the town of Sisatchanalai.

There is controversy among scholars regarding the origin and introduction of this style of Sukhothai stupa. Some scholars believe that it is the pure Thai workmanship, while others think that its style bears the influence of other nations. But recent research as well as the identification suggested by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, a great Thai scholar, on the basis of the figure of an ancient Chinese stupa[67] indicate that this ancient Chinese stupa closely resembles in style the original Sukhothai Chedi. In other words, the Sukhothati stupa is an imitation or copy of ancient Chinese stupa, which was probably introduced by

67. Boribal Buribhand, Luang: The Thai Images of the Buddha, p. 216.

King Ramkhamhaeng, who in the course of his visits to China brought back with him the style of Chinese stupa along with the art of ceramic ware and its Chinese style to his empire. The original style of the stupa, first imitated from an original Chinese source, was later perfected by Siamese artists.

**2. The Round Ceylonese Stupa.** This stupa bears the strong influence of Sinhalese art of architecture, which originated in this period at about the same time when the Lankavong Theravada Buddhist sect came to flourish in the Sukhothai empire. This stupa, no doubt, is the best example of Sinhalese art and workmanship in this land. The architectural features of the round Sinhalese stupa are a square or rectangular basement, the alms-bowl-shaped dome or anda, the square base or Banlang (in Thai corresponding to the Harmika of the typical Indian stupa. Above the square base is the successive superimposed spire. This style closely follows the style of the Thuparama stupa of the ancient city of Anuradhapura in Ceylon, which in turn also derived its style of the Thupiaruma stupa at the ancient city of Anuradhapura in Ceylon, which in turn also derived its style from the Indian Hinayana stupa of the time of Emperor Asoka.

The further developed stupa of this period, which also belongs to this category, is the stupa at Chedi Wat Chang Lom. It is round in plan with the decorative design at the basement in the form of a basement sur-

rounded by rows of the half-body and head of elephant caryatids. It is no doubt a true imitation of the stupa in Ceylon, which was built by King Duttagamini the Great. Other architectural characteristics of Chedi Wat Chang Lom are the rectangular basements, lotus pedestal, bell-shaped dome, the platform or banlang above the dome; the Plang Chanai or circles diminishing in diameter, superimposed one upon the other, and the spire of the stupa or the Pli (plantain-bud) (Fig. 16). This stupa was built by King Ramkhamhaeng in order to show the preservation of Ceylonese art in his empire.

**Fig. 16**

Chedi of Wat Chang Lom at Sawankalok, Sukhothai Province — The Second Group of Sukhothai Stupa (Chedi), Architecture of Sukhothai Period



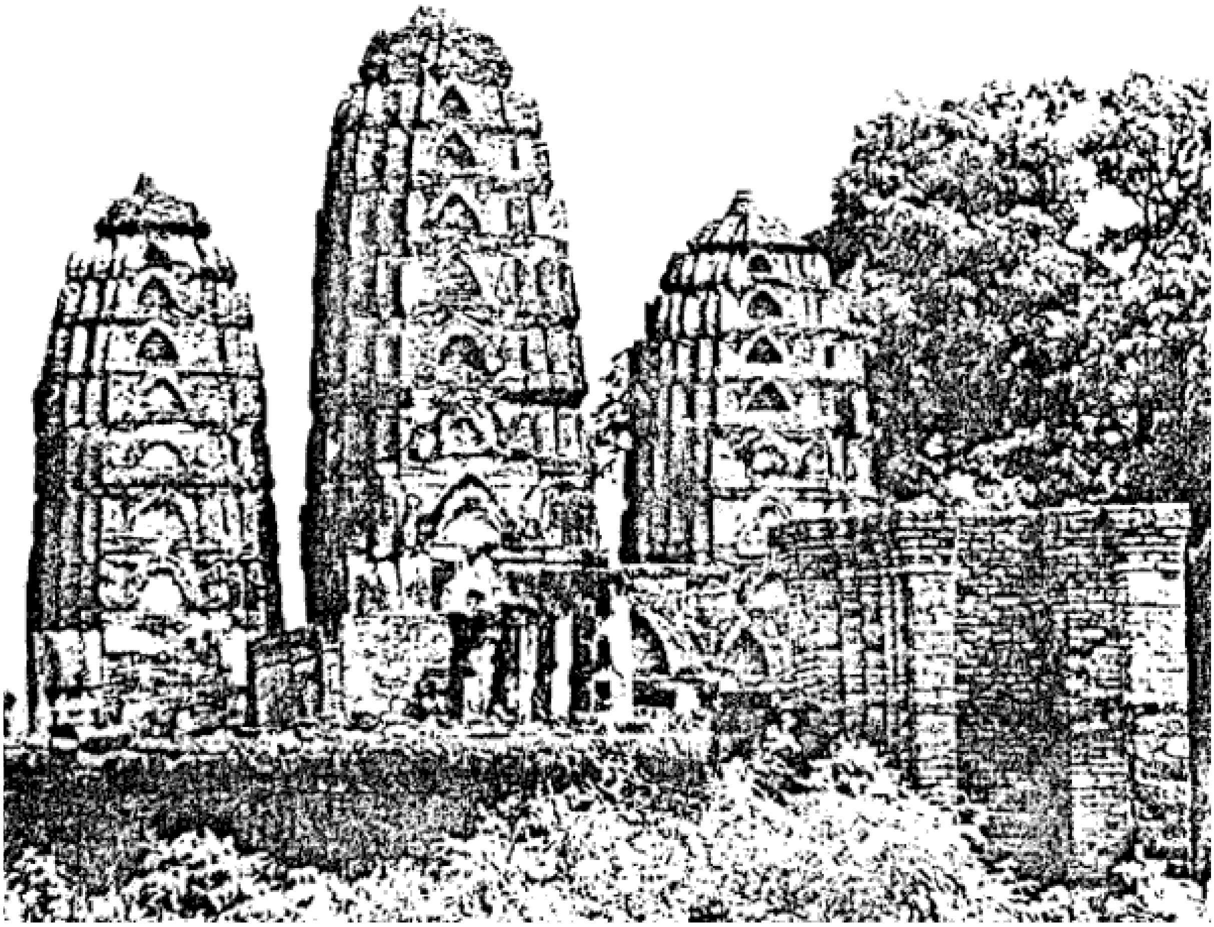
**3. The Sri-Vijaya Stupa.** It is the last style of stupa in the Sukhothai period. Its features bear a strong influence of Mahayana Sri Vijaya architecture from the South of the country mixed with the influence of the round stupa of Ceylonese style. It is characterized by a tall rectangular basement which is sometimes decorated by the niches to house the Buddha Image with the upper portion of tall rectangular basement crowned with a round stupa of Sinhalese style, surrounded at the four corners by the smaller stupa of the same type.

Apart from the chedi or stupa, the Prang or another type of Siamese stupa also appears in this period. The Phra Prang is the further developed architectural building from the corner tower of Khmer temples. There is further development of the Phra Pang from the original Khmer style. The best example of Phra Prang is the large one at Wat Pra Sri Ratana Mahathat-Chalieng in the city of Sisatchanalai. This Prang was restored in later time in the Ayudhya period. But its original date of construction is attributed to King Maha Tammaraja I or Lithai.

The architectural feature of this sanctuary is the high plan and the whole structure was not erected on the rectangular superimposed terrace-basement like the corner-tower or Khmer temple, but was erected on the single basement. The portico or front porch was attached to the side of structure, but only the front por-

tico is more bulging in a prominent way than other porticos. The Sukhothai Prang has no lintel or door-jambs like the Khmer Prang, but there are the niches to house the walking Buddha image (Fig.17). Thus this style of architecture represents the specialized form of the Phra Prang having its characteristics as those of western architectutre.[68]

**Fig. 17**



Phra Prang of Wat Sri-Sawai, at old Sukhothai City,
Architecture of Sukhothai Period

The bot and vihara of Sukhothai style also have their peculiar features. Usually the vihara of this period is larger than the bot or Ubosoth, and the walls are

68. Department of Fine Arts: The Siamese Buddha Images, p. 5.

pierced by small rectangular cavities instead of large windows. Some of the viharas of this period show the influence of the monuments of the Polonnaruva period in Ceylon (11th–12th century A.D.).

Regarding the roof and superstructure of both bot and viharas in this period, it can be said that the roof is arched in outline for beauty. Usually there are two or three rows of pillars and next to the third pillar-row is the wall of the structure. As already stated, there are no windows but small cavities instead of the former. Also in front of either bot or vihara, the large door-entrance was added along with the wind-cavity. This form corresponds with the frontal system in the field of architecture, because when we just open the door-entrance of building or enter inside it, the light touches the main Buddha inage, which is installed at eye-level.

Other architectural features are the absence of the ceiling which lines the inclined parts of the roof. There are two kinds of tiles on the roof: One is up and down-tiles and other is cut-end tiles bathed with green gum-colour. The Cho-Fa and decorative extension of the apex of the gable[69] as well as Bai Raka are also on the roof of building.

The town-planning in the Sukhothai period is also quite interesting. All the religious buildings of the empire were located in the centre of the town. The

69. In Thai called Panlom. It is one of the specialized local Thai terms of architecture.

town was surrounded by three large and high ranging walls, which included the fort or citadel between them. The planning of the bot in the Sukhothai period was characterized by the presence of galleries surrounding the Phra Prang or Chedi. This temple-planning later on became the prototype of Ayudhya architecture.The pillars were made from laterite. The capital of the pillars was designed in the form of Bua Klum or lotus clusters having no abacus of pillar. But, there is the hole in order to make it strong.

Before we conclude, it is necessary to refer to one specialized vihara. It is the vihara of Wat Sri Chum in Sukhothai city. This building is extraordinary in its architecture constructed of a double wall. It has a small tunnel inside through which one can walk up steps, around the back of main large Buddha image, to the roof. This peculiarity of construction might have been borrowed from the vihara in the city Polonnaruva in Ceylon, where a narrow passage is found inside the double wall of some vihara so that the people could walk around the main Buddha Image by way of worship. This technique was modified by the Thai artists at Wat Sri Chum, which can still be seen.

## Sculpture

The sculpture of the Sukhothai period represents the real glory of this school of art. It is generally held that Classical Thai sculpture reached its peak during this

period. In the field of sculpture the influence of the earliest Thai art of the Dvaravati period can be noticed in Sukhothai workmanship. From the Mon of Dvaravati, the Thai adopted Theravada Buddhism and their basic conception of image-making too. They seem to have borrowed their iconography and plastic manner. Thus, the Sukhothai sculpture is closely linked with the Dvaravati which derived its model from the Gupta art of India; as well as, the influence of Dvaravati shadow art.

The conception of Sukhothai school of sculpture represents the image of the Buddha after his Enlightenment. The body of the Buddha, is in complete rest, the muscles are relaxed and the face is serene with a faint smile reflecting a state of deep inward contentment. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha belonged more to the sphere of Nirvana than to the Earth, and therefore, the Thai artists conceived the image in which this ethereal quality is perfectly realized.[70]

The Sukhothai Buddha Images, whether sitting, walking or reclining, have a particular undulating and soaring character which seems to render immaterial the heavy bronze of which they are made. Yet, this spirituality does not destroy the sculptural qualities of the images. The human forms, simplified and idealized, are exquisitely modelled and there is no dishar-

70. Silpa Bhirasri, Prof.: An Appreciation of Sukhothai Art, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 17, p. 5.

mony between the abstract idea and its material realization. This had not always been the case in the past . In some images of the Gupta period, the sculptural volumes appear too heavy to convincingly portray a transcendental and sacred figure.

The representation of the Buddha image is, in fact, to complex problem, mere techniques and artistic qualities are not sufficient because it is the essence of the Buddhist doctrine that the sculptural forms must convey the true expression. Indeed, it is the Doctrine that the sculptural forms must convey the true expression. Indeed, it is the Doctrine that it is not the physical form of the Teacher which inspires the image. Thus, in conceiving the Buddha image, Thai artists sought to portray through the use of human forms, a being who was removed from earthly affairs.

The sculptors of Sukhothai did solve this dilemma. Their creations seem to master the tumult of human passions, and the faint smile of the images tells us of happiness and peace gained by subduing the earthly and primordial instincts. One may note, technically that the parallel, delicate, undulating lines of the mouth and the base of the nose and eyes emphasize this spirituality.[71]

According to scholars, the masterpiece of Sukhothai sculpture is the fine Buddha Image. The Sukhothai

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71. Silpa Bhirasri, Prof.: An Appreciation of Sukhothai Art, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 17, p. 6.

Buddha Images can be divided into four general categories as follows:

**1. General Group**: To this group most of the Sukhothai Buddha Images belong. The Buddha has a tall flickering flame-like motif of the halo on the ushnisha of the head, small hair-curls or the size of hair-curls well proportioned, an oval face with arched eyebrows, a hooked nose and a smiling expression, no parting line round the topknot of the head, pointed or tapered chin and prominent nipples. The shoulders are bare but the waist is small. The lobes of the ears are curved outward to break the angle formed by the attachment of the neck with the shoulders. The stretched right forearm is delicately bent outwards to harmonize with the contrasting mass of the trunk with that of the legs, while the lower line of the legs slightly curved serves to complete the flowing character of the whole unity. The hanging flap of the robe on the left shoulder is quite long, drawn up to the navel and terminating in a knotched design. Or the ends of the robe are in two pieces in the form of a centipede fang.

The Buddha is usually seated in a folded-leg fashion (samadhi Rob in Thai), in the posture of subduing Mara (Mara Vijaya Mudra). The pedestal of the image is always plain. The middle of the pedestal is a concave shape which differs from that of Chiengsaen pedestals — the convex form. There are very few of lotus-petal

pedestals (Fig. 18). We also notice that from the gentle curve of the mass of the legs to the flickering flame of the halo, the soaring undulating sense follows its harmonious development. There are five different postures or mudras of the Buddha Image in this group.

**Fig. 18**



The Bronze Seated Buddha Image "Mara Vijaya Mudra"
Sculpture of the Sukhothai Period

**2. Buddha Image of Kampaengpet group:**[72] The Sukhothai Buddha image which belongs to this group is characterized by a long face, broad forehead and a pointed Chin (Fig.19).

**Fig. 19**



The Bronze Head(s) of Buddha Images, Khampaengpet Group
Sculpture of the Sukhothai Period

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72. Kampaengpet is the name of the Province in Upper Central Thailand, near the Province of Sukhothai of modern times.

**3. Buddha Image of Pra Puttha Chinarat Group:** This group is attributed to the reign period of King Lithai (Circa 1347–1368 A. D.) and later. The sculptural features of the images of this group are characterised by the round face (unlike the oval shape of the first group) — like the form of fruit of the bel tree — or a copy of the Gupta face of Buddhat image, having round, plumb cheeks, a corpulent body and four equal fingers.[73] The high flickering flame of the halo on the protuberance of the Buddha's head is longer and higher than that of the general group. The best specimen of this group is the image of Pra Puttha Chinarat in Wat Pra Sri Ratana Mahatat in the Pisanulok province of Thailand.

**4. Buddha Image of Wat Trakuan Group:** The Buddha image of this group was first discovered at Wat Tradkuan in the old city of Sukhothai, and hence the name of the Buddha image after that temple. The Sukhothai image of this group displays strong early Chiengsaen influence. Its sculptural features mark the halo on the ushnisha on the head of Buddha in the form of a lotus-bud, the short end of the robe over the left nipple and a narrow forehead shows early Chiengsaen characteristics. The seated Buddha image of this group is with crossed legs, with the sole of the feet upwards, clearly visible. The Buddha also has broad, flat face and short

73. Department of Fine Arts: The Sukhothai Art, p. 127.

nose (Fig. 20, In this group we have also some images which display Sinhalese influence, and they might well be older than the images of the General Group.

**Fig. 20**



Sukhothai Buddha Image of "Wat Trakuan Group" Sculpture of Sukhothai Period

One of the most venerated Buddha images in Thailand is Pra Puttha Sihing, which is said to have been obtained from Ceylon either in the reign of King Sri

Indraditya, the founder of Sukhothai empire or his great son, King Ramkhamhaeng in the second half of the 13th century A.D. However the workmanship of this image is purely Thai, though Sinhalese characteristics can be seen here and there.

During the Sukhothai period the Buddha images are in four postures: seated, reclining, standing and walking. But one specialized posture of Buddha Image originated in this period for the first time in the history of Thai Buddhist art, which is one of the finest specimens. The walking Buddha called the Lila (in Thai and Yatra in Sanskrit), posture is the masterpiece of Sukhothai sculpture. One heel of the Buddha is raised while the other foot is planted firmly on the ground, and one hand is lifted in the gesture of giving instruction to dispel fear, while the other arm swings naturally at the side of body.[74]

The figures are in the graceful gesture symbolizing the turning of the Wheel of the Law. The body has a graceful undulation. The head is shaped like a lotus-bud, with the neck spreading at its base merging harmoniously into the shoulder. The delicate outline of the lobes of ears curve a little outwards serving to emphasize the harmony of the whole composition. The toes on the walking images are also of equal length, the soles tyre flat and the heels protrude markedly (Fig. 21).

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74. Boribal Buribhand, Luang & Griswald, A. B.: Thai Image of the Buddha, Thai Culture, New Series, No. 18, p. 12.

**Fig. 21**

The Bronze Walking
Buddha-Image
or
Lila Posture —
Art of
Sukhothai Period



Besides the Buddha Inmages, statues of Hindu gods were also cast in Sukhothai. This does not imply any compromise of religious beliefs in that period. It has always been the custom in the Buddhist kingdoms of South-East Asia from remote time to the present day to attach Brahmins to their courts to perform royal and civil ceremonies. It was for this reason that statues of Hindu gods were cast in this period and also later such

as in the Ayudhya and Bangkok periods. For instance, there are statues of Siva, Uma, Vishnu and Harihara (Siva and Vishnu mixed together) and Brahman. Their faces resemble those of the bronze Buddha Images in the General Group. The only difference lies in the dress and ornaments.

Apart from the bronze and metal Buddha Images, the stucco images are also found. Many stucco bas-reliefs were used to decorate religious architecture. The stucco decoration in this period consisted of the representation of human, animal and mythical figures or ornaments.

As stucco, composed of lime, sand and the juice of sugarcane, hardens in a few hours, the artist must possess skill to execute the work quickly. Although the work may be corrected by the addition of more stucco, the beauty of the decoration depends on the sensitive touch of the artist. If the ornaments were done by a talented man they have a striking vitality, otherwise, they may be mechanical and unexpressive.

The most beautiful stucco bas-relief is the representation of the Buddha descending from Tavatimsa Heaven, at Wat Prapang Tong Lang outside the Old town of Sukhothai. It is very similar to a mural painting in the Northern Temple of Polonnaruva, Ceylon, which was painted in the middle of the 12th century A.D. This stucco might have been influenced by the Ceylonese mural.

## Mural Painting

The final phase of the Golden Age of Thai Buddhist art is painting. But unfortunately except for some ornamental designs, the painting of the Sukhothai period has been completely obliterated. However, the style of painting in this period was two dimensional art, in contrast to the three dimensions of Western painting. Much of its beauty depended on the expressiveness of the line.

Mural paintings are at the ceiling of a narrow stairway at Wat Sri Chum, Sukhothai. There are several stone slabs incised with Jataka scenes and identifying inscriptions in the Sukhothai script. These mural paintings show the influence of the Indian style in the form of Indianized figures. The linear style and the detailed representation of jewellery and ornaments (Fig. 22, 23), lead one to believe that they were derived from illuminated manuscripts brought by the Sinhalese monks, who had settled down at Sukhothai.

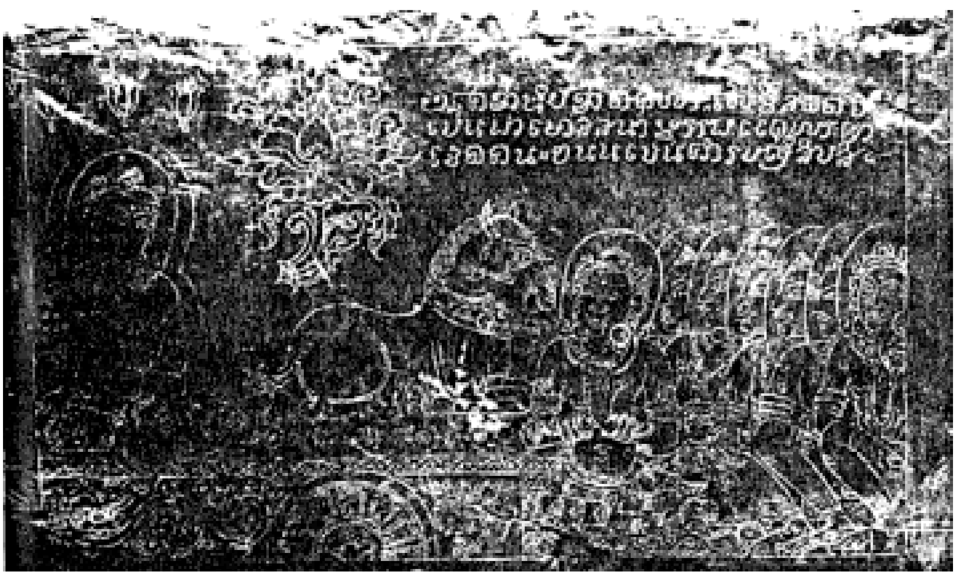


**Fig. 22**

Stone-Slab-Engraving: At Wat Sri Jum, Sukhothai Province, Sukhothai Period



**Fig. 23** Detail of one stone-engraving at Wat Sri Jum of Sukhothai showing the characteristics of Indian art

But, the other example of painting is a little different from that of Indian origin. It is the fragments of murals at Sat Chedi Chet Thaew, in the town of Sawankalok. The murals represent the Buddha seated among his disciples and adoring devotees. Its date begins from the 14th century.

In the middle of the 14th century A.D. the political power of Sukhothai was on the decline. The new Thai chief subdued the Sukhothai king and established the new kingdom of Ayudhya as the capital city of the country. Sukhothai now became one of the vassal cities of the new powerful kingdom of Thailand. But, the Sukhothai school of art did not come to an end with the loss of independence. It continued to flourish well up to the 16th century A.D. Apart from that, whenever one side or the other seized one of the cities of old Sukhothai kingdom, the conqueror brought Sukhothai artists to his own capital so that they could work and impart their skill to new apprentices. Thus the artistic influence of Sukhothai was more pronounced and widespread after the loss of its political independence than ever before.



**Fig. 24**

The Figure of the Buddha subduing Mara (above) and in meditation (below) flanked by angels: The Mural painting in the Stupa of Wat Chedi-Chet-Thaew, Sri Satchanalai, Sukhothai, Sukhothai Period



# U–TONG

# Art of the U-Tong Period

## (Circa 12th–15th Century A.D. )

The Chiengsaen school of Buddhist art flourished in the extreme North of Thailand from the 11th century A.D. and onwards, and the Sukhothai style flourished in the North and uppermost Central part of the country. But in the Central part of Thailand, there was another developed Buddhist art, the U-Tong school. As noted earlier, Central Thailand was originally the site of the Dvaravati kingdom, which was later occupied by the Khmers.

The U-Tong art that flourished in this Central part is, therefore, a composite art. Khmer art existed in Lopburi up to the 13th century A.D. U-Tong was a centre of Khmer culture in this country, which later lost direct contact with the Khmer empire. U-Tong did not receive any other cultural influence from outside peoples. So, the art followed the Khmer style.

But, this does not mean that the U-Tong style is a mere imitation of the Khmer one. The new spirit of Hinayana Buddhism, united with the peculiar sensitiveness of the Thai people gave birth to a new

type of Thai sculpture having proper characteristics in this art. However, the art of the Hinayana element and conception of this school bear the influence of the art of Dvaravati and Sukhothai period.

Thus the U-Tong school represents composite art of different artistic influences: the Hinayana element from Dvaravati art, the Mahayana element from Lopburi art (Khmer conception and workmanship) and Hinayana Theravada element bearing Ceylonese influence from Sukhothai art respectively. U-Tong represents the period from 13th century up to 15th century A.D. Scholars designated this school of art as the art of Early Ayudhya period.

The name U-Tong is still obscure, but recent researches suggest its area corresponding to the capital of the Thai principality before the rise to power of Ayudhya, the second capital of Thailand. U-Tong was the name of a Thai prince, who belonged to the royal line of Chiengsaen dynasty or the old Eastern Chiengrai family of King Prohm of Chaiprakarn in ancient Lanna-tai empire in the extreme North of Thailand. This Thai prince later on became the founder of the Ayudhya kingdom under the name, King Rama Ibodi I. On the other hand, the name U-Tong is also attributed to the ancient city located in lower part of the Menam Valley in central Thailand.

Its other name is Supannapham. The name U-Tong literally means "a Golden Cradle", because the

Thai prince, according to Siamese traditions and legends was given at cradle of gold by his father. The name Supannapham or Suvarnahbhumi, in Pali, means Land of gold or source of gold also. Nowadays the old city of U-Tong or Supannapham is in ruins which lie to the west of the modern province of Supanburi.[75]

U-Tong is now one of the sub-districts in that province. The border of the city U-Tong spreads northward up to Sarnburi and eastward up to the mouth of Chao Pya or Menam river. In the South it extended up to the province of Ratburi and in the West up to Pegu in Lower Burma. This city represents the meeting ground of several cultures and civilizations such as the ancient Mon culture, Dvaravati kingdom, Khmer culture from Lopburi region, and lastly the Thai Hinayana Buddhistic culture from the old capital of Sukhothai kingdom.

## Architecture

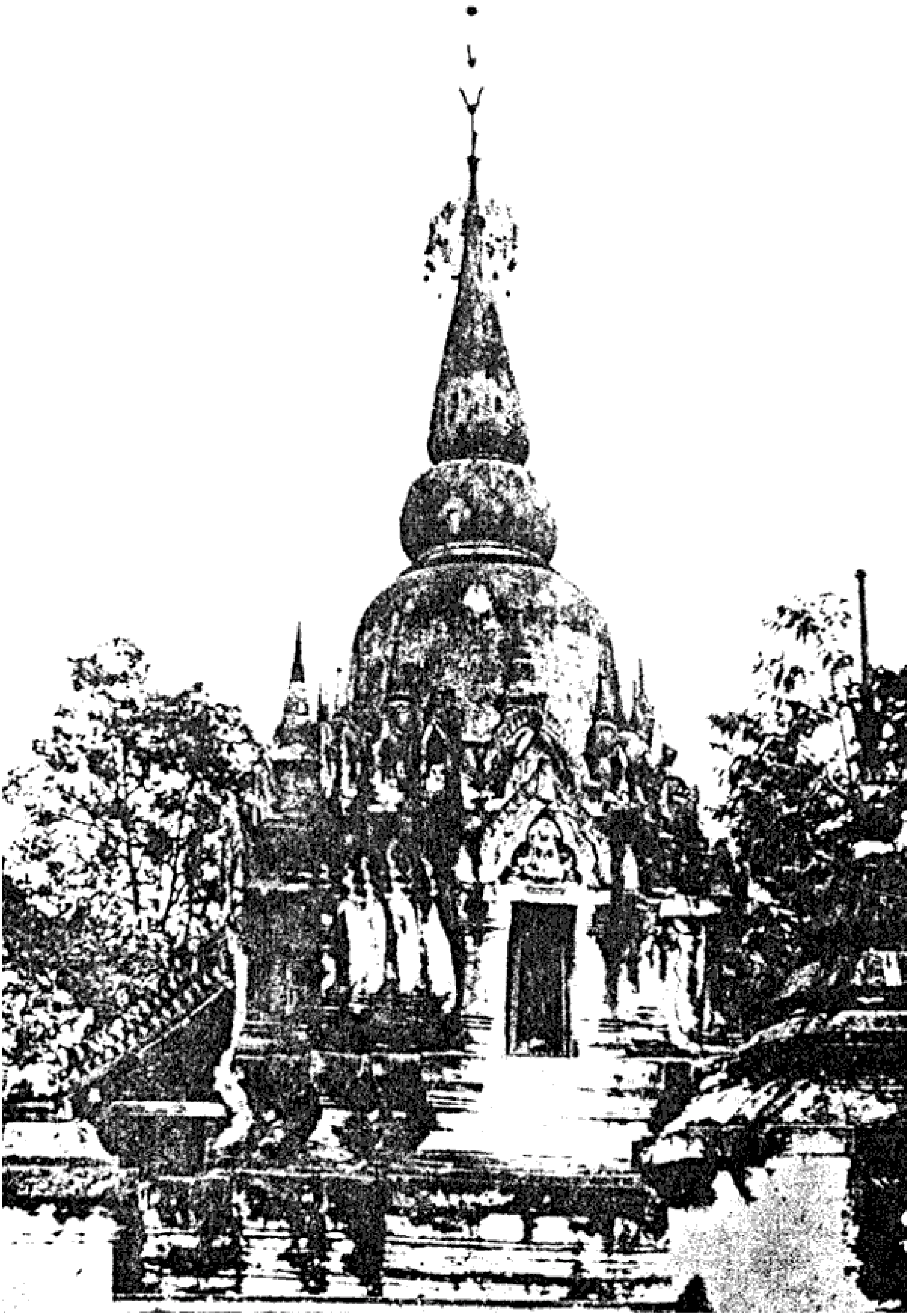
The religious architecture which belongs to the U-Tong period represents the mixed style of architecture from other cultures, such as the style of Sukhothai and

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75. Supanburi (Town of Gold) is situated in the North of Bangkok. U-Tong at present is the name of the sub-district of this province (Damrong Rajanubhab, H. H. Prince,: Tales of Ancient Times, p. 32).

Sri-Vijaya architecture as well as Khmer style of architecture from Lopburi art. One example of architecture in this period is the Pra Mahathat of Chinat, in the Chainat province. It is the stupa of Wat Prat Barom That which is characterized by the mixture of influences of Sukhothai and Sri-Vijaya styles. Its architectural characteristics are: the two superimposed rectangular basements shortened at four corners (called Yor Mum in Thai) or the bent rectangular plan. The body of structure is in the style of Sri-Vijaya architecture, which is similar to that of the 4th group of Sukhothai stupa.

Both of them derived their inspiration from the same sources. There are four porticos or niches attached to the body of structure in four directions. The porticos are decorated with pediment and door-jambs. On the pediment is represented the design of Seated Buddha image in high relief. The body of structure was crowned by a round stupa of Sukhothai style. Surrounding the main round stupa are the small stupas in replica or in imitation of the central one (Fig. 26). Another religious building of this period is the Pra-Prang of Wat Pra Sri Ratana Maha Thai in Lopburi Province. It is the Prang architecture which is quite different from the Khmer prototype of Prang at Lopburi as it is much more indented at the corners, and the decoration on the base of the wall is quite high.



Stupa Pra Mahatat of Wat Borom-tat, at Chainat province, Thailand — Architecture of the U-Tong Period **Fig. 26**

## Sculpture

The sculpture in this period played an important part in the history of Buddhist art in Thailand. The sensitive design and elements and of the U-Tong sculpture, especially of the Buddha Image, seems to suggest the pensive, intense meditation of Lord Buddha (in order to find out the reason of the causes and effects in human life). Although tense and thoughtful, these images appear illumined by a mystic light. Their immobile rigidity is far more touching and far more suggestive than any realistic gesture and expression. Indeed this immobility of form enlivens the spirit.

The outstanding feature and essence of the U-Tong school of art is its fine sculpture, especially the Buddha Image cast in bronze and metal. The style of the Buddha Image shows the strong inter-combination with other artistic influences such as the influence of Dvaravati, Lopburi, Khmer art and Sukhothai art respectively. The sculpture of this period has one of the important elements — it is the human anatomy, though stylized and simplified but far less amended by supernatural consideration than in Sukhothai sculpture. The forms of human anatomy in this art are strong and decisive, though frequently softened by a richly variegated patina which it is worthwhile to examine with it powerful glass.[76]

76. Department of Fine Arts: Art of U-Tong, Ayuddya and Ratatna Kosin, p. 24.

The Buddha Images of this period are rigid, austere and pensive. From the images of this period it is clear that the artists wanted to convey the imagination of Lord Buddha sitting immobile under the Bo-tree in his last meditative effort prior to his Enlightenment. This element very much differs from the sculpture of Sukhothai art, where the artists wanted to show their skill in the representation of Gautama Buddha or the Enlightened One, who although living in a physical body belonged to the abstract world of Nirvana.[77]

The general sculptural characteristics of the Buddha Image of this period are as follows:

The Buddha image of the U-Tong school has the erect trunk and the perpendicularity of a stretched right arm in sharp contrast with the horizontal mass of the superposed legs. The shape of the head is cubical and the curls of the hair are so small as to appear as mere dots. A filet running from the attachment of one ear to the other separates the hair from the forehead. The eyebrows are well marked, the nose is rather flat, and the mouth is ample — in the old specimens it does not bear the peculiar smile of the Sukhothai images. The prominent chin is divided by a medial depression which in most specimens is emphasized from the chin up to the base of the nose. But, there is one constant

77. Silpa Bhirasri, Prof.,: Op. Cit., p. 10.

characteristic of the U-Tong Buddha image, which is a small band dividing the hair from the forehead or a parting line round the topknot (called Raiprasok in Thai). The other features are the long robe falling from the left shoulder and terminating in a straight line; a folded leg posture is the attitude of the Buddha while subduing Mara, and the pedestal concave in outline.

There is a controversy among the Thai and foreign scholars who have classified the U-Tong Buddha Images in different styles based on their character. Recent researches and archaeological studies in this country have brought to light the exact style of Buddha Image in this period. There are three different styles of U-Tong Buddha Image, according to its artistic inspiration and imitation of other artistic schools of art. The well-known French scholars, George Goedes and P. Dupont, have classified the images into two groups. The three different groups of U-Tong Buddha Images, according to Thai scholars, are as follows:

**1. The First Group:** The Buddha Images belonging to this group represent the result of the mixture of Dvaravati art with the Khmer or Lopburi art. This group is probably the earliest of the three and dates from the 12th–13th century A.D. (Fig. 27) which we have discussed in the preceding pages.



**Fig. 27**

The Buddha Image
of the First Group
of U-Tong Period

**2. The Second Group:** The Buddha Image in this group shows more prominant Khmer or Lopburi influence in its style. This second group is probably later than the first group which is assigned to 13th–14th century A.D. The characteristic of the image in this group is the great transformation of the halo or skull-protuberance. It changes from the small knot or flower-bud like of the first group into a flame-like motif. This innovation might have occurred first in the image of the

second group of U-Tong art before it was handed on to the Sukhothai style of the third group of image in the same period. Other features show the Khmer influence like the square face and jaw, the long mouth curling up at the ends, which leads one to believe that the artist must have been strongly imbued with Khmer feeling.[78] The almost straight forehead, thick lips and mouth, half closed eyes and the long end of the robe over the navel after, falling down from the left shoulder (Fig. 28).



**Fig. 28**

The Bronze Seated Buddha Image: The Second Group of U-Tong Period

78. Le, May, Reginald: The culture of South East Asia, p. 194.

**3. The Third Group:** There are strong Sukhothai influences in the Buddha Image of the third group. This groups probably existed in the 14th–15th century A.D. The sculptural features of the image in this group show traces of Sukhothai art, but it still conveys the trace of Lopburi or Khmer art as the mouth is large and the nose tends to be flat with the dot-like curl of hair on the head.

That the Sukhothai element in the face of the Buddha is oval in shape, not rectangular or square like the first two groups, is clearly visible. The eyebrows are now arched and sharply marked by incised lines. The hair is in the form of dot-like curls or we may say in the form of pin-points. On the tall ketumala or skull-protuberance, there is clear Sukhothai influence the halo having the form of flickering flame-like motif.

Other features are like those of second group, but we come across more slender and slight outline of the body than the second group, small waist, large shoulders, slender fingers and the long end of the robe over the naval (Fig. 29), indicating the Sukhothai influence.

In the U-Tong period, only the Buddha Images represent the essence of this school of art and we have very few paintings. It appears that there is no trace of U-Tong painting extant.



**Fig. 29**

The Bronze Seated Buddha Image: The Third Group of U-Tong Period



# Ayudhya

# Art of the Ayudhya Period (14th–18th Century A.D.)

The new kingdom of Ayudhya came to be established by King U-Tong in 1350 A.D. King U-Tong proclaimed himself as King Rama Tibodi. The full name of the city was Dvaravati Sri Ayudhya where the influence of the Vishnu cult was also prominent. This kingdom played an important part in Siamese history for more than four centuries.

The Ayudhya school of art is regarded as the national art of Thailand. It is the most developed artistic creation which flourished during the long period of the establishment of the Ayudhya kingdom in Siamese history. Its capital, Ayudhya, was the second capital of Thailand. During the four centuries of its existence it witnessed tremendous growth and development of art which began in 1350 A.D. and flourished up to 1767 A.D. till the destruction of the Ayudhya kingdom by the Burmese.

The development of religious art during this period was splendid from 1350 A.D. up to 1767 A.D. Ayudhya had 33 monarchs, who belonged to seven different dynasties. During more than four centuries of the existence of this kingdom, Buddhist art developed extremely well. Scholars have divided this era into four sub-periods according to the cultural and artistic transformation in different reigns:

**1. The Art of the First Period,** corresponds to the period when King U-Tong founded the capital of Ayudhya as an independent kingdom in 1350 A.D. This period ended with the reign of King Boroma Trailokanath or King Trailok in 1488 A.D., a period of 138 years.

**2. The Art of the Second Period,** corresponds to the last part of the reign of King Baroma Trailokanth (1491 A.D.) down to the end of reign of King Tong Dham (1628 A.D.) a period of artistic activity for 137 years.

**3. The Art of the Third Period,** corresponds to the reign of King Prasat Thong in 1630 A.D. down to the end of the reign of King Trai Sra in 1732 A.D. covering-a period of 102 years.

**4. The Art of the Fourth or Last Period,** corresponds to the reign of King Boromakot in 1732 A.D. to the end of Ayudhaya kingdom in the reign of its last King Ekatat, who lost his Kingdom due to the Burmese invasion in 1767 A.D., an artistic period of only 35 years.

The Buddhist art in the Ayudhya period represents the imitation art of the former Thai art. The art of Sukhothai, U-Tong, Lopburi or Khmer period became the prototype of Ayudhya art. We can trace the artistic influence of those schools of art. But a new artistic conception or element was also introduced during this long period of artistic activity.

### 1. The Art in First Period (1350–1488 A.D.)

The Buddhist art of this period may be called the early Ayudhya art. During the art of Early Ayudhyu period the Lopburi (Khmer) and U-Tong schools of art played a prominent role through their strong influence on the workmanship of the Ayudhaya art.

## Architecture

It is said that the Lopburi or U-Tong style of architecture was very popular in this period. The central monuments of various Buddhist monasteries founded during this period were constructed in the form of Pra-Prang following the Lopburi or U-Tong style. But there are some characteristics which differ from the Khmer prototype, though the Prang of this period represents the imitation structure of the former art.

First, the Prang is higher than Khmer Prang of Lopburi or U-Tong, the higher basement being nearly the same level with the body of the structure. Another architectural feature of the Prang in this period is the porch, attached to the body of the Prang. The most prominent porch of the Prang is in front. The space of the whole structure of the Prang consists of the surrounding gallery. Besides, the Prang consists of the Bot or Temple. The decoration design on the spire of the Prang has disappeared but the design of the super-

structure remains at the door-entrance and door-jambs leading to inner part of the structure only.[79]

Apart from the Prang, in the first Period of Ayudhya style of architecture, we can see the stupa or Chedi. The round chedi which bears the influence of Sukhothai style appears in this period. Up to the later part of this period we can see the introduction of square or rectangular plan reduced at four corners of Chedi.

The body of this structure is accompanied by the four porches facing towards the four directions. As regards the style of bot or vihara in this period it can be said that the structure has no window but there is the hole for wind on the upper part of its wall. This was used in the structures in place of the window. There is the porch or portico attached in the front side of the bot (named in Thai — Mukhasan). The interior part contains rows of pillars (called in Thai — Saewharn). The wall of the structure was not decorated with narrative frieze of painting. Only the simple outline of a lotus-line decorates the four sides.

## Sculpture

During the First Period of Ayudhya art, sculpture production followed the style of U-Tong sculpture. From the beginning, the Second and Third U-Tong period styles of sculpture were popular at Ayudhya. Most of

79. Amatayakul, T. The Art of Ayudhya Period, p. 45.

the sculptures in this period are Buddhist Images. The style of the Second Period of U-Tong Buddha Image flourished in Ayudhya even before King U-Tong founded his capital and was current at the time of the foundation of the Ayudhya kingdom. Side by side with it, the Third Style of U-Tong school of Buddha Images continued to flourish till the reign of King Borom Trailokanath (1448–1488 A.D.).

The sculpture characteristics of the Buddha Image in this period are: The halo on the skull-protuberance or ushnisha in the form of lotus-bud or flame-like motif influenced by the Second group of U-Tong Buddha Images; the small spiral curl hair on the head; the Raiprasok or parting line round the topknot; the square chin in the shape of human chin; the long end of robe falling down from the left shoulder, square-shaped folded legs and a pedestal with concave outline.

But in 1458 A.D. a great transformation of sculpture production took place in Ayudhya. King Borom Trailokanath had a set of bronze Buddha images cast, representing various previous lives of the Buddha (in Thai, called Pra Bodhisattva Haroi Prachot of 500 Incarnations). All these bronze Buddha images exemplify the transition from the U-Tong style to that of typical Ayudhya sculpture. One can, therefore, say that the real Ayudhya style began about the middle of the 15th century A.D.

## Painting

Thai painting, for religious purposes, had existed since the Sukhothai period, but the evolution in the technique of painting took place in the Ayudhya period and later. In the first period or early artistic period of this kingdom, the style of painting (1350–1488 A.D.) shows strong Khmer and Sukhothai influences.

The characteristics of figures are rather stiff and heavy, and the colours used are black, white and red with only a few spots covered in gold. The colour of painting, according to artist, belongs to the family of monochrome colour or single colour which was used in the first and second period of Ayudhya art in the composition of figures. In the third period, however, we see the use of polychrome composition in the mural paintings. Polychrome colour means mixed colour composition.[80]

One of the best examples of mural painting in Early Ayudhya period is the mural painting in the crypt of the main Prang of Wat Ratburana in Ayudhya built in 1424 A.D. The paintings are of two types. In the lower part of the crypt are hieratic rows of seated Buddhas and standing disciples and in four niches are the Jataka scenes. The mural paintings from the crypt in the Prang of this monastery show the new stage in the evolution of Siamese painting, because for the first time

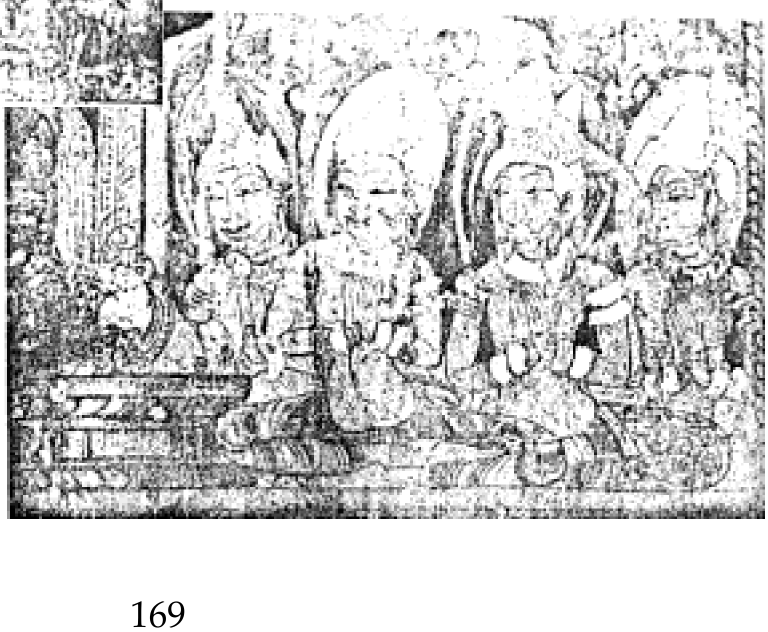
80. Department of Fine Arts: The Evolution of Wall Painting of Thailand, p. 176.

the artist painted the figure on the Fresco surface, which looks fresh and bright (Fig. 30) . The style of the use of monochrome composition and sketching of outline in the form of independent work is not to imitate an old mural example. An old mural example usually represented the repeated figure in narrative story of the parallel line, but the opposite is so in the mural painting at Wat Ratburana. The composition of figures is done by the artist in the form of small groups of figures, without caring for the balance, harmony and rhythm of representation. Thus, this mural painting impresses the eyes as there is no repeated representation like the painting of old.

**Fig. 30**



Assembly of angels: Fresco in the crypt inside the big Pra Prang of Wat Pat Durana, Ayudhya, Ayudhya Period



## 2. Art in the Second Period (1491–1628 A.D.)

The art of Ayudhya in the Second Period corresponds to the last part of the reign of King Borom Trailokanath down to the end of the reign of King Thong Dham in 1628 A.D. The climax of this art is to be seen in the time of King Borom Trailokanath, who went to rule Pisanulok in Northern Thailand in 1463 A.D. The art bears strong influence of the Sukhothai style which reached Ayudhya.

### Architecture

The principal monument of Buddhist monasteries during this period is the round stupa or chedi of the Sinhalese style which was prevalent at Sukhothai. The popular construction of the Prang has been changed into the construction of a round stupa having bell-shaped dome of the Sukhothai style. The general architectural characteristics of the stupa were imitated from Sukhothai chedi but the new pattern of architecture also existed which is the adaptation of bell-shaped dome or body of Chedi higher than that of the Sukhothai dome, and between the banlang or harmika in the Indian style of stupa and the Plong Chanai or circles diminishing in diameter, superimposed one upon the other, rising to the top of the stupa's spire.

Between these two portions of the stupa a new form of low rows of pillars are placed. These rows of

pillars are called in Thai as Saewharn. One best example of the stupa of this period is the great stupa at Wat Yai Chaimonkol built by King Naresuan the Great and three large Chedi at Wat Phra Sri Sanpet in Ayudhya province. Its architectural features consisted of a bell-shaped dome, and all the four directions of the dome are attached with the porches (Fig. 31).



**Fig. 31**

The Chedi of Bell-shaped style at Wat Pra Sri-Sampet, Ayudhya province, Architecture of Second Period of Ayudhya Art

We also notice the decorative designs of Chedi in this period. It is only plain masonry of the whole structure from the basement up to the spire, with few decorative designs on the lion style basement. The lion basement is the lowest part of the structure carved by the artist in the shape of Goruda or demon (Yaksha). In the case of the bot and vihara, there are no decorative designs on the walls.

## Sculpture

The real Ayudhya sculpture had its clear characteristics in the reign of King Rama Tibodi II and onwards (1491–1529 A.D.) which are chiefly marked by the production of the Buddha Image. The essence of the Buddha Image of this period lies in the imitation style of Sukhothai Buddha Image. The sculptural characteristics of the Buddha Image were influenced by the Sukhothai type as regards the halo and outline of Buddha's face. There is a small parting line round the topknot on the head, the big end of the robe falling down front the left shoulder. The end of the robe does not terminate in a centipede fang line like that of Sukhothai style, but in the form of a straight line or falling as two pointed ends of the robe.

Other features followed the style of Sukhothai image, but most of them cannot be compared to real Sukhothai images. The facial expression is usually lifeless, though the pedestal of the image is much more decorative. Lots of the Buddha images in this period have the gesture of the Mara Vijaya Mudra. In some cases, however, we have the seated Buddha Image, both sides flanked by the two disciples (Fig. 32) and in some images the pedestal is decorated with the figures of Yakshas or Demons. Very few of the images are of the Walking Buddha and in meditation mudra are available in this period.



**Fig. 32**

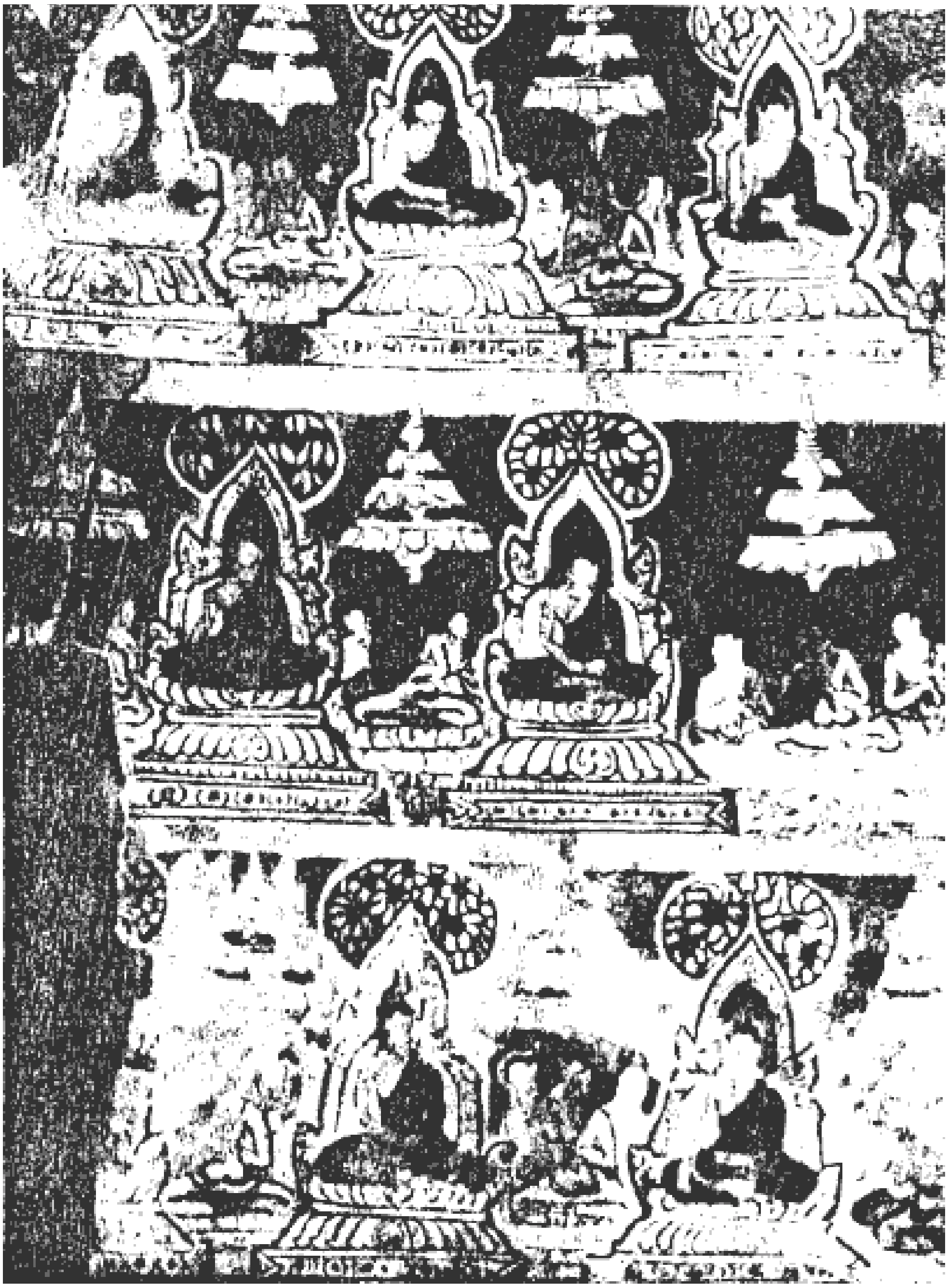
The Seated Buddha Image in middle flanked by two disciples: Sculpture of Second Period of Ayudhya Art

## Painting

The second Period of Ayudhya painting may be studied from illustrations on some manuscripts. These religious documents were probably produced in the 16th century A.D., and most of them deal with Buddhist cosmology. They show the gradual development of the Sukhothai influence in Ayudhya pictorial art. The use of monochrome colour in the composition of painting as well as many colours was popular. The illustrations are still following the old idea by the representation of repeated story in parallel line, heavy and rather

stiff with lifeless figures. They do not impress the eyes. The main colours are red ochre, black and yellow. The manuscripts of the second Ayudhya period represent a stage that shows the continuity and slow development of Thai painting (Fig. 33).

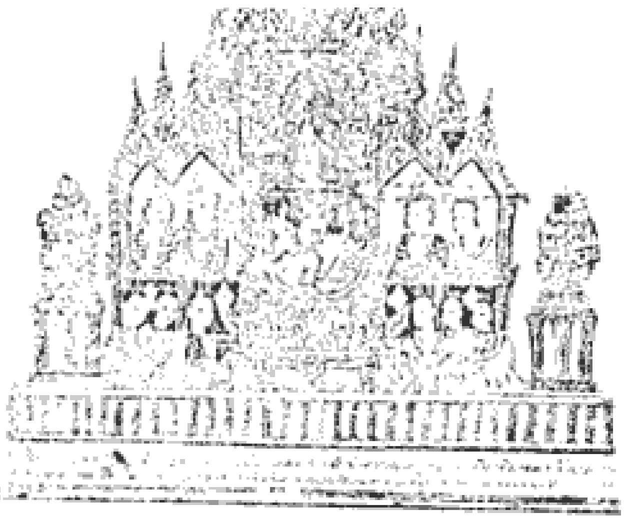
**Fig. 33**

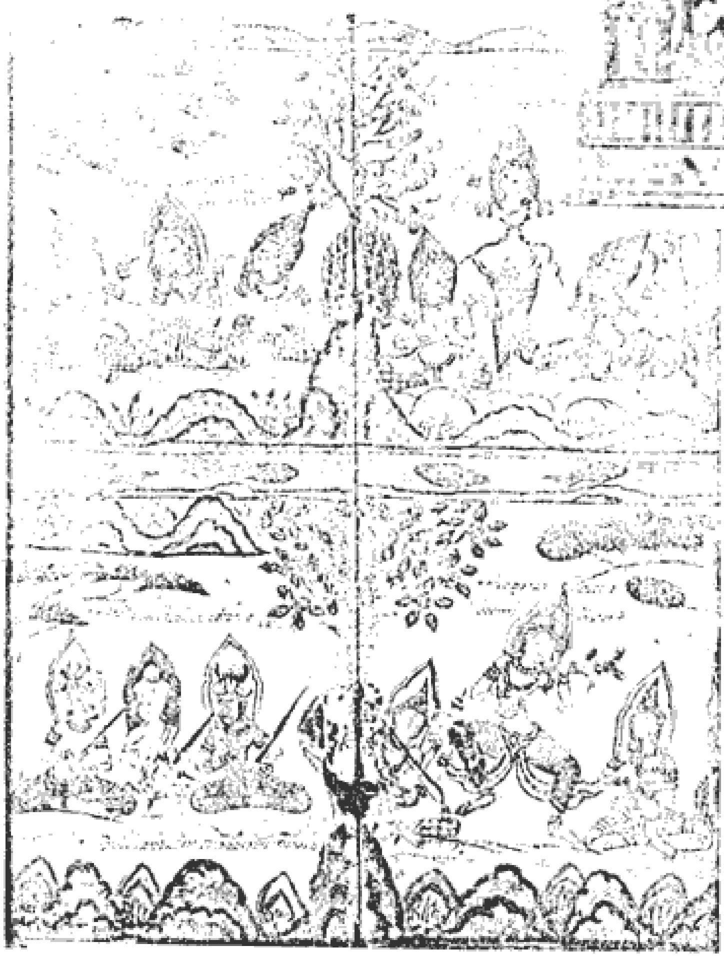


Detail of the mural at Wat Maha That in 15th Century Ayudhya showing the universal theme of composition of the Thai painting up to the 16th Century. To our knowledge only the murals of Wat Rat Burana in Ayudhya of the 15th Century differed from the universal composition

One of the most treasured manuscripts is Triphoum, devoted to Buddhist cosmology, containing illustrations of the ten Jatakas and the thirteen chapters of the Vesantara story. The figures of gods and goddesses in the Himavanta forest go back in stylistic conception through the Sukhothai stone engravings to the Ajanta type of painting in India (Fig. 34). Thus, the Indian pictorial art still influenced the manuscript paintings of this period.

**Fig. 34**





The Painting of
Traiphum Manuscript:
of Ayudhya Period

### 3. Art in the Third Period (1630–1732 A.D.)

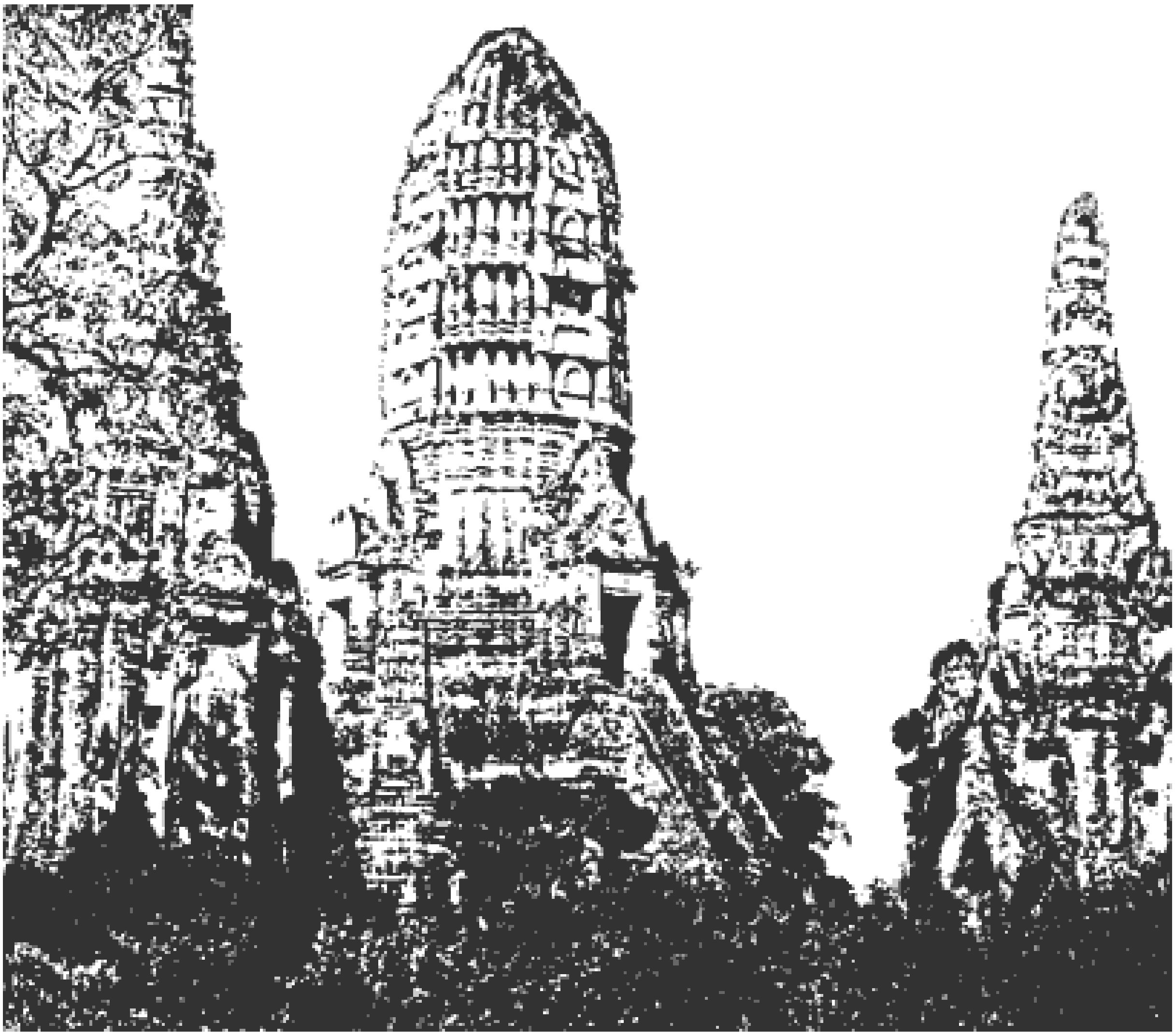
The art of Ayudhya in this period covers the reign of King Prasat Tong in 1630 A.D. up to the end of reign of King Trai Sra in 1732 A.D. covering a period of 102 years. It represents the mixture of several artistic influences on Thai art – especially the Lop-buri or Khmer style as well as the Chinese art and newly Western or European art. The latter art became fashionable during the reign period of King Narai the Great. During the days of King Narai, the influence of French art came to Ayudhya, in the wake of close diplomatic relationship between the Ayudhya king and France under the dictatorial rule of King Louis XIV.

#### Architecture

In the field of architecture, the Prang and Khmer architecture began to be popular again at Ayudhya in the second quarter of the 17th century following the subjugation of the Khmer by King Prasat Tong. The Prang in Khmer style of this period is the Prang at Wat Chai Watana Ram in Ayudhya. It is the imitation of Angkor Wat temple in Kambuja, but the style shows real Thai artistic inspiration and workmanship. Its architectural features consist of main central Prang accompanied by four small plan Chedi, the four corners of which are

linked together by the row of galleries (Fig. 35). It was the only commemorative monument in the reign of King Prasat Tong and this style of construction later completely disappeared.

**Fig. 35**



The Pra Prang at Wat Chaiwatanaram,
Ayudhya province — Architecture of the
Third Period of Ayudhya Art

Apart from the Prang in Khmer style, the redented Chedi also began to appear during this period. The redented Chedi is the Chedi with reduced corner from the basement up to the portion of neck of the bell-

shaped dome. This style of Chedi differs from the Chedi of the first and second period of Ayudhya art. The inspiration for this new peculiar style of Chedi came from the Ceylonese stupa and also the Sukhothai Chedi and Sri Vijaya architecture.[81]

The new style of religious structure was popular in the reign of King Narai the Great, whose close relationship with Western Countries, especially France, influenced the construction of religious buildings in this period. At the city of Lopburi which was the capital and residence of this great Ayudhya king, we can see the structure bearing the style of western art, especially the use of the pointed arch in roof construction and the introduction of western style landscape gardening.[82]

The royal palace of King Narai in Lopburi shows this style of Western architecture. In the field of art, this pointed arch in the roof construction is called the Gothic style. Its architectural features are the use of a pile of brick placed in the shape of a semi-circular arched door or superstucture of the monument. This semi-circular group of bricks face each other at the middle of the construction in the form of a pointed arch roof. In Thai, this western style is called the "Gothic Porch". The interior wall of the royal palace in this period is decorated with Western decorative

81. Department of Fine Art: Op. Cit., p. 52.

82. Organization of Tourism: An Appreciation of Thai Arts, p. 47.

designs. There is also the decoration of the ceiling following the style of Roccoco art in Europe.

The planning of the bot or vihara in this period of Ayudhya art was most impressive. Some bots or monasteries did not contain the porch and gallery surrounding it like that in the former Thai architecture. The windows appear again instead of the hole for wind. The windows are decorated by porches.

## Sculpture

In the reign of King Prasat Tong (1629–1656 A.D.) and his famous son, King Narai (1656–1688 A.D.), the sandstone Buddha Image became fashionable. When Cambodia or Kambuja became once more a vassal state of Thailand in the reign of King Prasat Tong, the Thai artists tried to imitate the Khmer works of art and these sandstone images became even more popular. It is said that during this period the red sandstone Buddha Images were also made in the Middle and Southern parts of Thailand, for instance, at the town of Chaiya, sub-district of Surathani province, Southern Thailand.

The important characteristics of these sandstone Buddha Images are double lips or a faint moustache over the mouth and sometimes a double line around the eyes of the Buddha. It is said that towards the end of the 16th century, the crowned Buddha images were very popular. The crowned Buddha images are called

in Thai Pra Song Khrueng meaning ‘the crowned and decorated’, they are clearly visible in the late Ayudhya period or the Fourth Period.

## Painting

Painting had reached a far-advanced stage in this period. This pictorial art is represented by a style typically Thai. Many colours were used as well as gold applied on figures and ornamental designs. It consisted of both portraits in the style of Western painting and illustrations of landscape, trees, mountains and water showing the Chinese style.

During this period, painting was polychrome or a mixture of different colours. Besides black, red and yellow colours the use of green, blue and violet colours in the painting of this period also became popular. The introduction of polychrome composition makes it more impressive. Mural paintings on the walls of religious structures, Lai Rod Nam designs of book-cases and the box containing Buddhist scripture, as well as the painting in manuscripts originated during this period.

The paintings in manuscripts in this period are the stylized landscape forms and the groups of neatly detailed plants and flowers which seem to be derived from Chinese porcelain. A type of floral ornament was no doubt present earlier, but not in such a naturalistic style.

### 4. Art of the Fourth or Late Ayudhya Period (1732–1767 A.D.)

The art of Ayudhya in this last period covers the reign of King Boromakot in 1732 A.D. down to the end of the Ayudhya Kingdom at the hands of the Burmese in 1767 A.D. The Buddhist art of the Late Ayudhya period, though covering the period of only 35 to 40 years, witnessed the new surge of evolution of real Ayudhya art. It is said that the Late Ayudhya art was closely connected with the art in the Third period which continued up to the Late period similar to the field of sculpture and minor arts.

It is on this basis that some Thai scholars hold that the art of the Ayudhya period consisted of the three sub-periods only. According to them, 35 or 40 years of Late or Fourth period of Ayudhya art is the period of restoration and preservation of the old fine styles of monuments and antiquities and no new artistic activities actually took place during this period. The art in this period represents the continued art from the Third Ayudhya period. This Theory is quite convincing, and therefore, the period has been termed as an independent period which covers very few years of its existence, but is full of progressive and peculiar characteristics.

## Architecture

From the start of King Boromacot's reign in 1732 A.D. to the collapse of the Ayudhya capital in 1767 A.D. many

ancient Buddhist monasteries were restored but very few monuments were erected. But, the old monuments have been restored and preserved in their best condition. A new style of monument, the redented stupa or Chedi flourished from the Third Period and became more popular in the Late Ayudhya period. The best example of redented Chedi is the large Chedi Wat Phukhao Tong (meaning the Chedi of Golden Mountain) (Fig. 36).

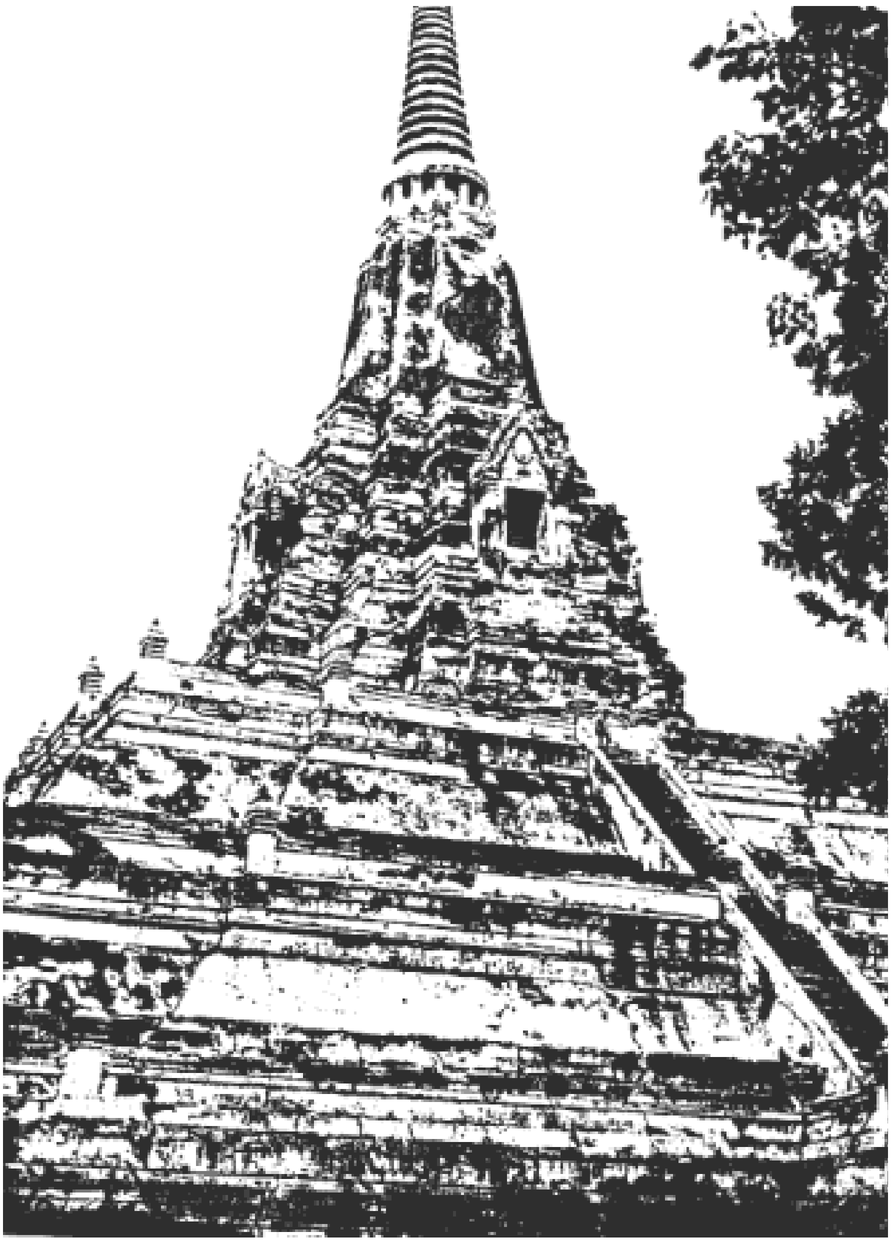


**Fig. 36**

The redented Chedi at Wat Phukhaotong: Architecture of the Fourth or Late Period of Ayudhya Art

Architecture of the bot and vihara of the Late Ayudhya period was very interesting. Their architectural features usually have a curved basement and roofs. They also use the brick pillars in the inner part of the structure. The capitals of those brick pillars are in the form of lotus buds, that are probably derived from the Sukhothai style. Some of the Ayudhya's capital pillars, however, are in the form of a stylized blooming lotus that points toward the Bangkok style of a later time. It is said that the piercing of brick walls by narrow rectangular cavities instead of large windows also figures in the Late Ayudhya style.

The religious buildings in this period were probably at first roofed by plain terracotta tiles. The glazed tiles presumably commenced in the reign of King Petracha (1688–1702 A.D.) His monastery and bot are covered by glazed tiles. Hence, its popular name is Wat Krabuang Khluab (in Thai it means Glazed Tile Monastery).

## Sculpture

The outstanding sculpture of this period is the production of Buddha Images with the most peculiar characteristics. They were the crowned or decorated Buddha Images, called Pra Song Khrueng in Thai. The Crowned Buddha Images were very popular during this period. They are either profusely decorated (called in Thai —

Pra Song Khrueng Yai) (Fig. 37) or else they are adorned with only a diadem and ear-rings called Song Khrueng Noi. In the latter type, lateral protrusions of diadem above the ears mark the main characteristic (Fig. 38)



The Crowned Buddha Image: "Song Khruen Yai"
Sculpture of the Fourth or Late Period of Ayudhya Art

**Fig. 37**

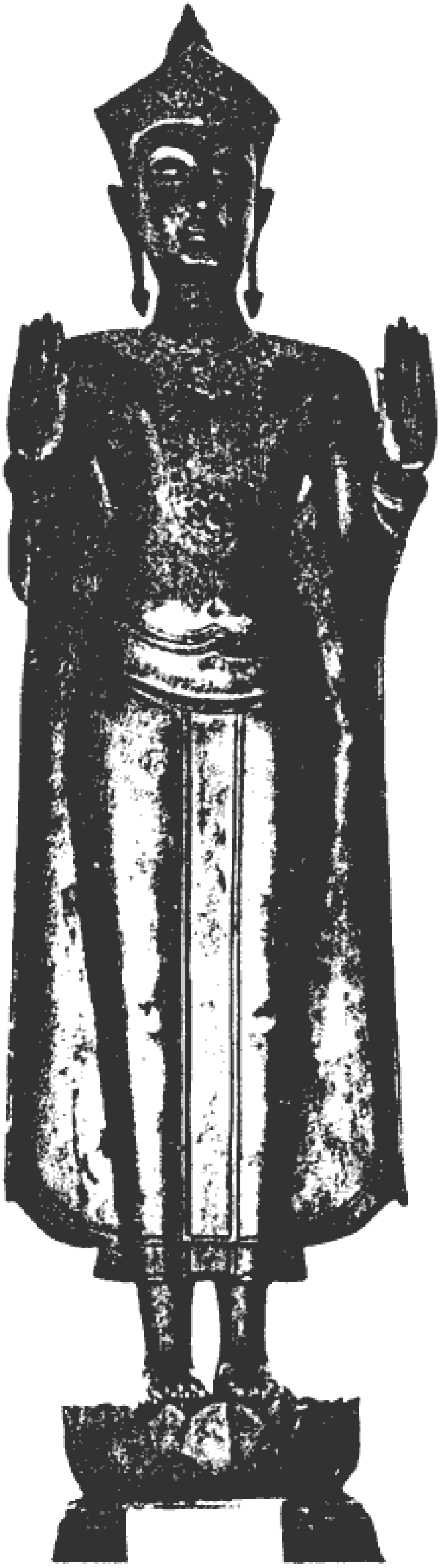


**Fig. 38**

The Crowned Buddha-Image, Song Khrueng Noi — Sculpture of the Late or Fourth Period of Ayudhya Art

The general characteristics of the crowned Buddha Image of this period are the long, shaped head adorned in front with an ornamental diadem. The head is crowned by a high conical mass formed by two, three or more plain rings having at the top the traditional lotus-bud. The lobes of the ears are enriched with pointed earrings, in the best tradition of Khmer art. Also the girth is enriched with ornaments, reminiscent of Lopburi art. The facial lineaments as well as the total form of the figure are inspired by the specimens of Sukhothai art.

Thus, the figures of the Ayudhya type are stiff, and they lack proper understanding of the plastic forms particularly the beautiful serenity of expression proper to the Classic Thai specimens. The other features of the image are the thin projecting masses of the robe of the Buddha at the sides of the legs formed by the robe hanging down from the arms, giving the statues a bell-shaped outline.

The gestures of these Standing Crowned Buddha Images are more impressive than all the former specimens of Thai Buddha Images. Most of the images have either one or two hands raised. In the first case, it means the Lord Buddha was forbidding his relatives from fighting for the water of the Rohini River. The Thais refer to this gesture of Buddha as Pra Ram Yat or Ram Yat Mudra. If the Buddha image had both hands raised, it meant that the Buddha was subduing the violence of

the ocean (symbolizing the mastery of mortal passions). This gesture was referred to by the Thais as the Ram Samudra Mudra. Thus were the new evolutions of the crowned Buddha Image in the late Ayudhya period.

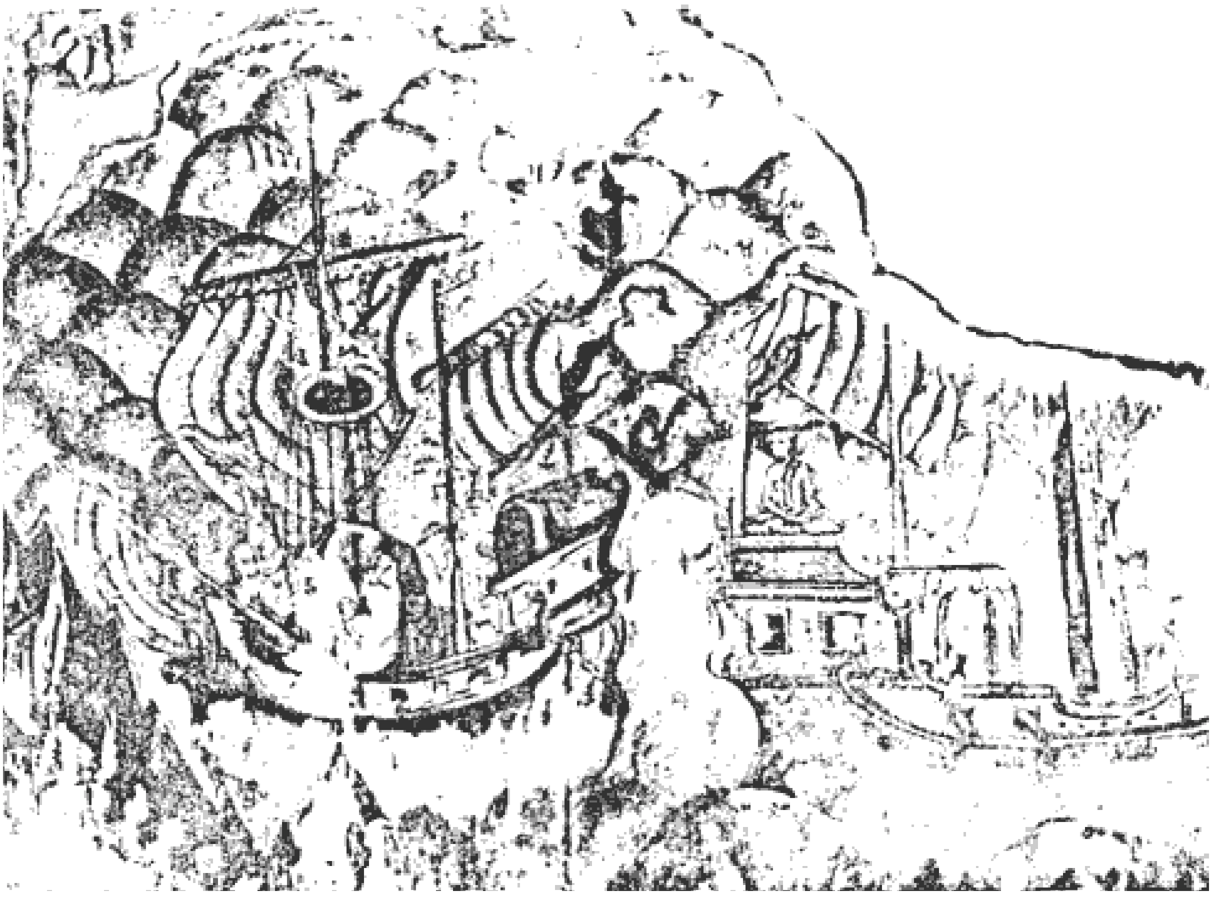
This is the last period of the sculptural production of Ayudhya which represents an art in its full decadence. During this time the taste of the Thais for ornamental effects had reached its summit. Lacquer and other metal works, stucco ornaments, wood carving and pottery were of a richness never before attained. However the taste for rich details had its detrimental effect upon sculpture, because this too started to be treated as an ornamental art.

In fact, the Buddha Images of this time are shapeless, covered all over with ornaments. It is true that these richly jewelled images were meant to represent a phase of the 1egendary life of the Lord Buddha himself in relation to the whimsical idea of a king or emperor who would not offer his homage to the holiness of the simple robe of the Buddha, and in order to abash the kings vanity, the Buddha appeared to the king radiantly jewelled. This was the conception of the Buddha Images in the Late Ayudhya period.

## Painting

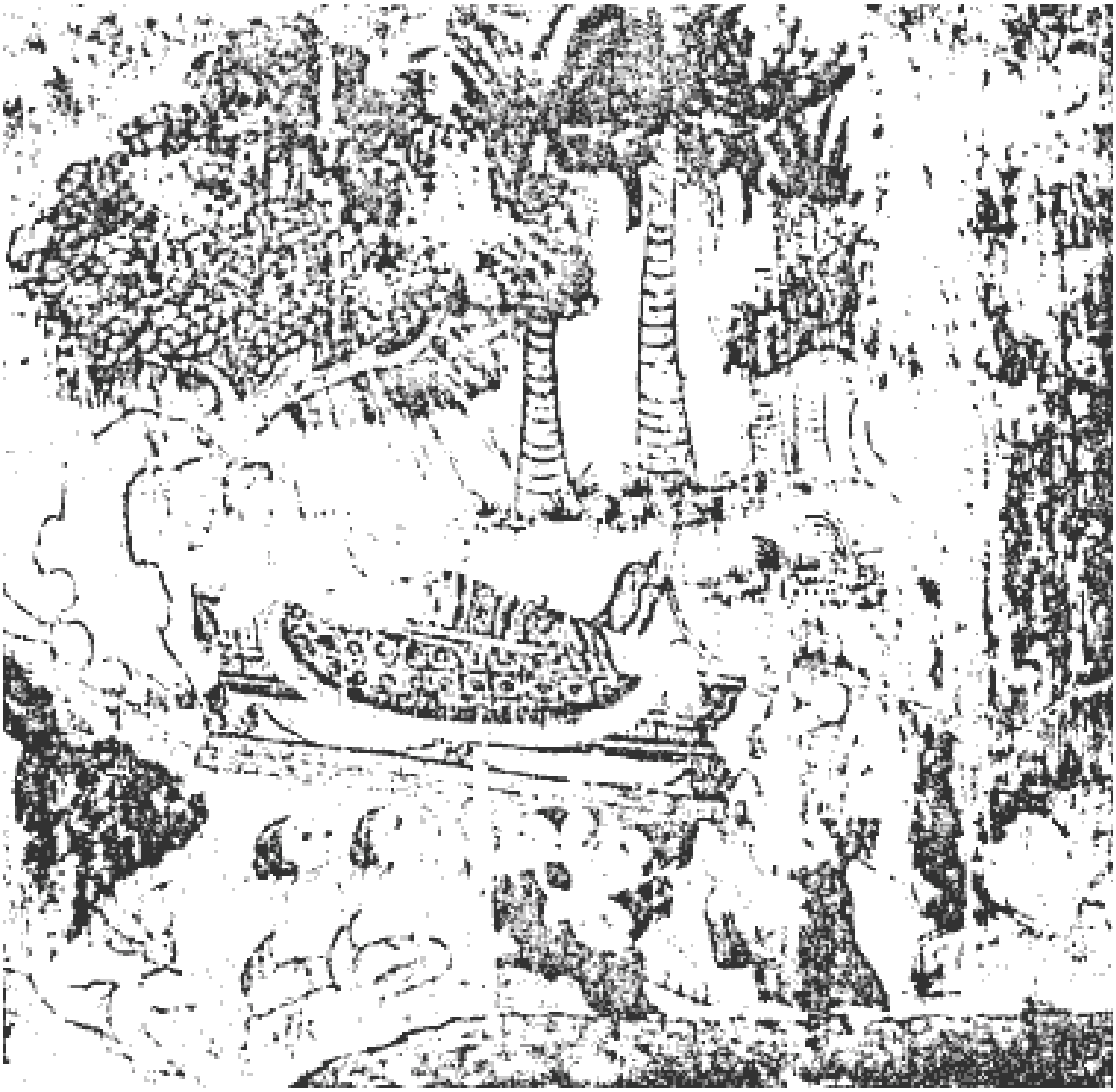
The Late Ayudhya painting is represented by a style typically Thai. As regards the technique and general characteristics of painting, the Late Ayudhya Period

was closely related to the painting in the Third Period. The extant specimens of the mural painting of this period belong to the reign of King Boromakot. The characteristic of the paintings differ from the previous paintings in composition and the use of colour. Though the use of colour is still polychrome, the sketched outline of figures is done skilfully by the painter. There is a background colour in mural painting, which differs from the colour in the representation of figures both human and animal, as well as celestial beings. If the background colour was black, the colour used in order to paint the ornament and costumes of human figures are a high tone colour or darker colours. **Fig. 39a**



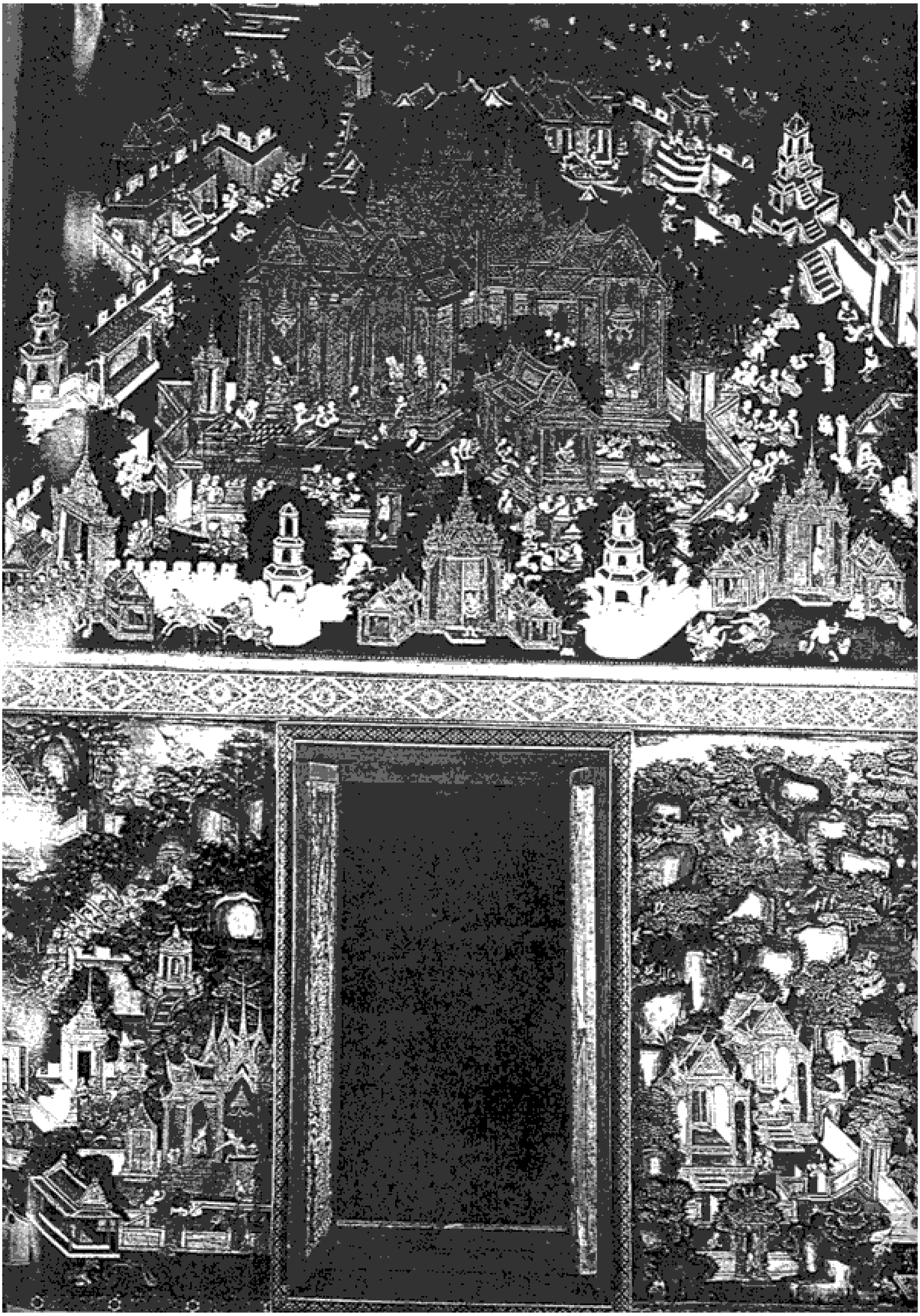
The Mural inside Somdet Phra Buddhakhosachan's Pavilion:
Wat Buddhaisawan, Ayudhya, Ayudhya Period

The best example of painting in fourth or late Ayudhya period is the mural painting in Somdet Phra Buddhakhosachan’s pavilion, at Wat Buddhaisawan, Ayudhya. The inner walls and inner window-panels are all covered by paintings. The west wall represents scenes from the last ten lives of the Buddha or Jataka, many of which are still in good condition. Those on the eastern wall depict various stories, for example the legend of when Phra Buddhakosachan voyaged by a junk to Ceylon and found Phra Buddhathatta Thera's boat in the middle of the sea (Fig.39a); the figure of the Buddha's Footprint on an island; the scene of the Thai King going on his elephant to worship the Buddha's Footprint. On the inner panels of the window are painted figures of men of twelve races, garudas, demons, kinaras (half human and half bird beings), angels in adoration and standing on pedestals. On the lower section of the southern wall are scenes from the Ramayana, while the middle parts represent figures of Buddhist disciples in various postures. The upper section of this wall portrays the scene of the Buddha's Enlightenment in true realistic style. The northern wall represents the story of the Three Worlds, here shown by heaven and hell, but the most interesting scene on this wall is the lower part, a figure of Prince Maha Janaka is sleeping under the tree surrounded by the royal musicians (Fig. 39b).



The Mural inside Somdet Phra Buddhakhosachan's Pavilion:
Wat Buddhaisawan, Ayudhya, Ayudhya Period **Fig. 39b**

The paintings in this pavilion show no signs of restoration. Their age is, therefore, about 260 years, but unfortunately rain can leak into the pavilion and the walls are falling off, thus destroying these valuable and exquisite masterpieces of art from this period.



# Ratanakosin

# Art of the Bangkok Period or Ratanakosin Period

**(Late 18th Century to Present Day or Early 20th Century A.D.)**

The Ratanakosin art of present Bangkok is from the time of the foundation of Bangkok as the capital of Thailand by King Rama Tibodi I.

Regarding the style and essence of artistic inspiration and workmanship of the Bangkok Period, the scholars believe that the brief art in Dhonburi period of 15 years and the reign of the first three Chakri kings of the Bangkok period can be considered as a continuation of traditions established centuries earlier in Ayudhya or Sukhothai.[83] The second phase of Bangkok art begins in the middle of 19th century A.D. under the leadership of King Mongkut or Rama IV. In the field of arts during this period many changes were introduced which gradually led to the modern and international style of the present day architects, sculptors and painters.

## Architecture

Bangkok religious architecture can be characterized as follows: the Prang and redented Chedi were quite popular during the first reigns (1782–1851). Important examples are the prang at Wat Rakhang, at Thonburi. And the best example of Prang at Wat Arun or the Temple of Dawn which was begun in the reign of

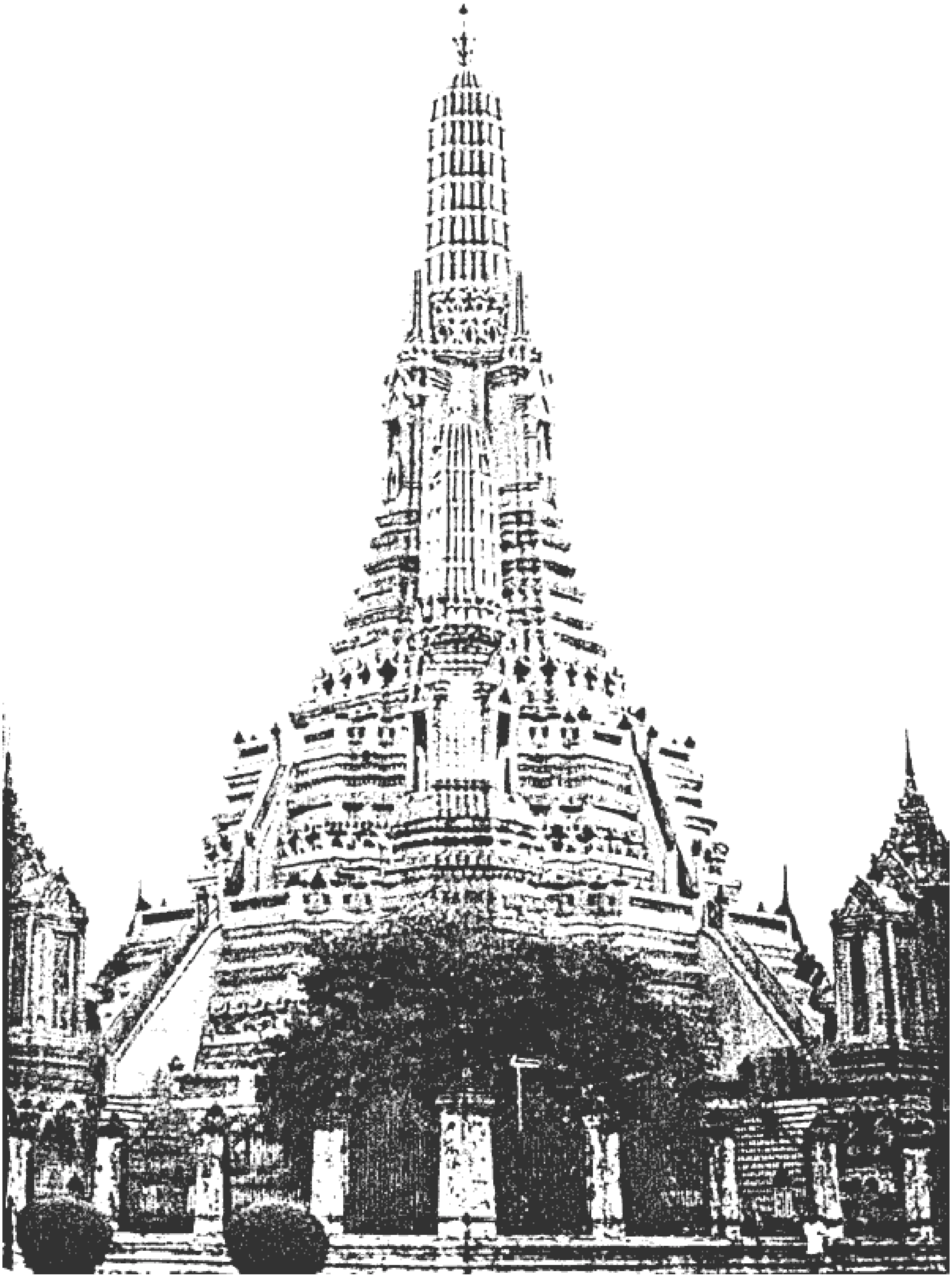
83. Lyons, Elizabeth: Art of the Bangkok, p. 2.

King Rama II, but was completed in the reign of King Rama III (Fig. 40). The architectural features of Pra Prang in the first three reigns of the Chakri kings are the body of Prang built on the lotus-basement and lion-basement, the body of structure attached with the four porches facing in four directions. There is no front porch while the spire of the Prang is decorated with the motif of petal of jack-fruit.

The round stupa of Sinhalese origin came to be popular in the reign of King Rama III when king Mongkut, who was still a monk, went on a pilgrimage to Northern Thailand. He was interested in Sukhothai art and brought to Bangkok the form of the Sukhothai round stupa. The famous round stupa of this period is the Pra Pathom Chedi at Nakon Pathom province (Fig. 41) which was also begun in the reign of King Mongkut and was completed in the reign of King Rama V.

The early Bangkok period ubosoth and vihara continued the late Ayudhya style; the ubosoth of the Temple of (the) Emerald Buddha for example, with its curved base, followed the Ayudhya formula. This curved line later on disappeared from Thai architecture. Apart from this, Ho Trai or the library which usually is a small scale model of form and is frequently built on stilts over a pond to prevent rats, white ants and insects from destroying the manuscripts, following the tradition of Ayudhya. The mandapa (square structure with a tapering roof) enshrining the Buddha's footprint at

Suraburi, which was built by King Rama I as a replacement for the old structure, also resembles the mandapa (used as a library) in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.



The Pra Prang at Wat Arun or the Temple of Dawn — Architecture of the Bangkok Period

**Fig. 40**



[The caption text is missing from the bad photocopy of this figure] Phra Pathom Chedi, in the Nakon Pathom Province — Architecture of the Bangkok Period

**Fig. 41**

During the reign of King Rama III Chinese art was cherished and some Buddhist monasteries were constructed in imitation of Chinese buildings without Thai-style roof decoration; the Ubosath and "vihara" of Wat Racha Orot and Theptida are the best example. The pillar is square and without any capital. King Rama III was a pious king who built many monasteries. For the later period, Wat Nivet Thamprawat at Bang-pa-in was built by King Rama V in Gothic style. It is said that the best example of a monastery in Bangkok is the Marble Temple or Wat Benchamabopit also constructed in the reign of King Rama V. This temple is a happier blend between Eastern and Western cultures. And it was duplicated, to be constructed again at Wat Thai Bodhgaya, Bodh-Gaya in Bihar State of India.

## Sculpture

Sculpture during this period represents a very interesting feature. During the days of King Rama I, few Buddha statues were made. Instead, he commanded that about 1,200 bronze Buddha Images from war-devastated areas in central and northern Thailand be brought to Bangkok. These images were then restored and distributed to many Buddhist monasteries in and around Bangkok; some became the principal Buddha Images in the Ubosath and Vihara, some were installed in galleries. Most of them belong to the Sukhothai, U-Tong and Ayudhya styles and the most

important of them are now in the galleries of Wat Po.

Buddha images that were produced in the reigns of King Rama II and King Rama III are more or less the same. Crowned Buddha images were popular during these two reigns with the artists usually paying more attention to decoration than to the facial expression of the Master. Examples are the two large crowned, standing Buddha Images in the temple of Emerald Buddha.

King Rama IV had a new type of Buddha image created. The Buddha became more human in appearance without a skull-protuberance and wearing a monastic robe covered with folds. But this type of Buddha image was not popular. In the reign of King Rama V, Thai artists returned to the old forms with the skull-protuberance, the transparent robe and the folded leg posture. During this period many contacts were made with foreign countries and the artist tried to humanize the Buddha image as much as possible by trying to follow the Gandharan Buddha image in India. Examples can be seen in the Buddha calling down the rain. Sometimes a famous old Buddha Image was also copied; the main Buddha image of the Marble Temple is a copy of the Pra Puttha Chinarat at Pisnulok.

From the reign of King Rama VI onwards the Buddha images were more and more humanized though they still kept some important characteristics such as the flame-like halo on the skull-protuberance, the ushnisha, long ear-lobes and the monastic dress. The best example

is the large Standing Buddha Image created in 1957 A.D. by Professor Silpa Bhirasri, an Italian man, one of the greatest contemporary Thai artists, in order to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of Buddhism (Fig. 42).



**Fig. 42**

Standing Buddha-Image,
Sculpture of Late Bangkok
Period (20th Century A.D.)

Apart from the Buddha Image of the Bangkok period, the statues of Pra Malai, a Buddhist disciple who went down to preach the Buddhist doctrine to all suffering creatures in hell, were also made. A few Hindu images were also cast.

## Painting

Painting in the school of the Bangkok Period synthesizes all other Thai schools and as such we may reckon this period as classic for the painting. It has risen to an impressive style. Indeed in the murals of the Buddhaisawan Chapel, Wat Suthat, Wat Suwannaram, etc. we may appreciate five different styles differing from each other according to the subject treated; namely:

1. Classic style treating divine and mythological subjects and royal personages. Here the faces remain expressionless, the meaning of the action being shown by the peculiar postures and gestures.

2. Classic style treating characters of the Ramayana epic. The faces of these characters express the feeling of the action.

3. Musicians and dancers, courtiers and persons of the upper class bearing a distinctiveness proper to their rank treated either in classic or realistic style.

4. Common people rendered in a realism proper to Thai art. In this type of painting we note a sense of humour which corresponds perfectly to the joyful character of the Thai people.

5. Scenes of Hell. Realistic type also. Here the artist concieved the most fantastic punishment and distortions of the human figures imaginable.[84]

At the beginning of the Bangkok period, Chinese influence began to disappear. Mural painting on the lateral wall of Buddhist monasteries executed between the reigns of King Rama I and King Rama III were divided into two registers. The upper section represents the assembly of celestial beings who come to worship the main image of the Buddha. The lower register, which is on the same level as the windows, shows scenes from the Buddha's life or from his previous incarnation. Behind the main Buddha image is a representation of Buddhist Cosmology and in front, the episode of the enlightenment of the Buddha is depicted. These paintings are executed in many colours and always have gold leaf applied.

The Bangkok mural painting school probably reached its zenith in the reign of King Rama III as can be seen from the Ubosoth and Vihara of Wat Sutat. The vast interior is totally decorated with paintings, from the height of about one metre from the floor up to the ceiling. The massive pillars are also entirely enriched with murals. It is a lofty veritable museum of Thai art. Composition after composition illustrating the previous lives of the Bodhisattvas, scenes of fantastic fairy lands with beautiful kinnaras and kinaris (half human and half bird beings) (Fig. 43), visions of a heavenly land with all sorts of animals and plants, scenes from

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84. Silpa Bhirasri, Prof.: The Origin and Evolution of Thai Murals, p. 18.

the Ramayana stories, popular life; the real world intermingled with the fantastic imaginary one. Our astonished eyes move around and up until the painting vanish in a mystic dark atmosphere.

**Fig. 43**

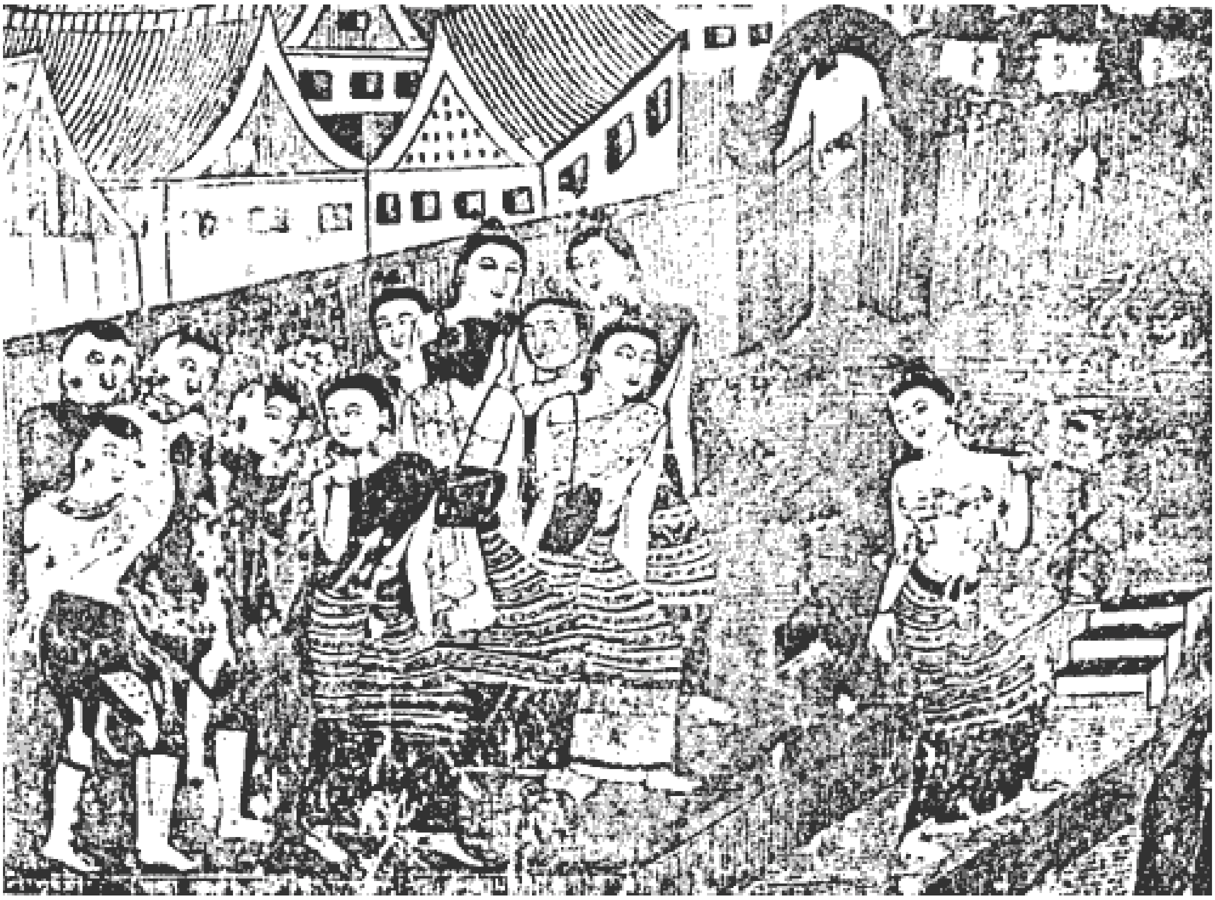


Figures of Kinnara and Kinaris (half-human/half-bird beings): The Mural Painting in the Vihara Luang of Wat Suthat, Bangkok, Bangkok Period

In this time a Chinese influence again reappeared. In the reign of King Rama IV the western painting had their effect on Thai artists. Examples can be seen in the mural painting in the Ubosoth of Wat Bowornniwet where there are figures of Europeans as well as western per-

spective and technique. The most famous painter in this reign was Khroa-In-Khong, a Buddhist monk.

**Fig. 44a**



The period of Bangkok includes also the contemporary Northern school which present charcicteristics different from those of Central Thailand. The northern painters cherished to paint mundane subjects as a daily chronicle giving them an importance, which in central Thailand was given to religious subjects treated in classic style, because the northern painters were not bound to a strict conventionalism. At Wat Phumin of Nan is the best example rendered in that realistic style, which is both charming and amusing. The group of the girl going to the market followed by naughty suitors was made by a real master (Fig. 44a & b).



The Mural painting of Young Group: In the Ubosothra-Veharn of Wat Phumin, Nan, Northern School of Art, Bangkok Period

**Fig. 44b**

Finally, the latest Bangkok mural painting is very interesting to discuss. The mural painting on the wall of the winding gallery of Wat Pra Kaew (where the Emerald Buddha is) are all the long paintings of the Ramayana divided into 180 panels covering the entire length of the wall. These mural painting scenes were repainted by the command of King Rama III. The repainting has been done in reign after reign through the reign of King Rama VII up till today. In the present

day, the former Bangkok Classical style of the beginning has been absent. Roughly, instead by the modern technique mixed with the old tradition (Fig. 45a & b).

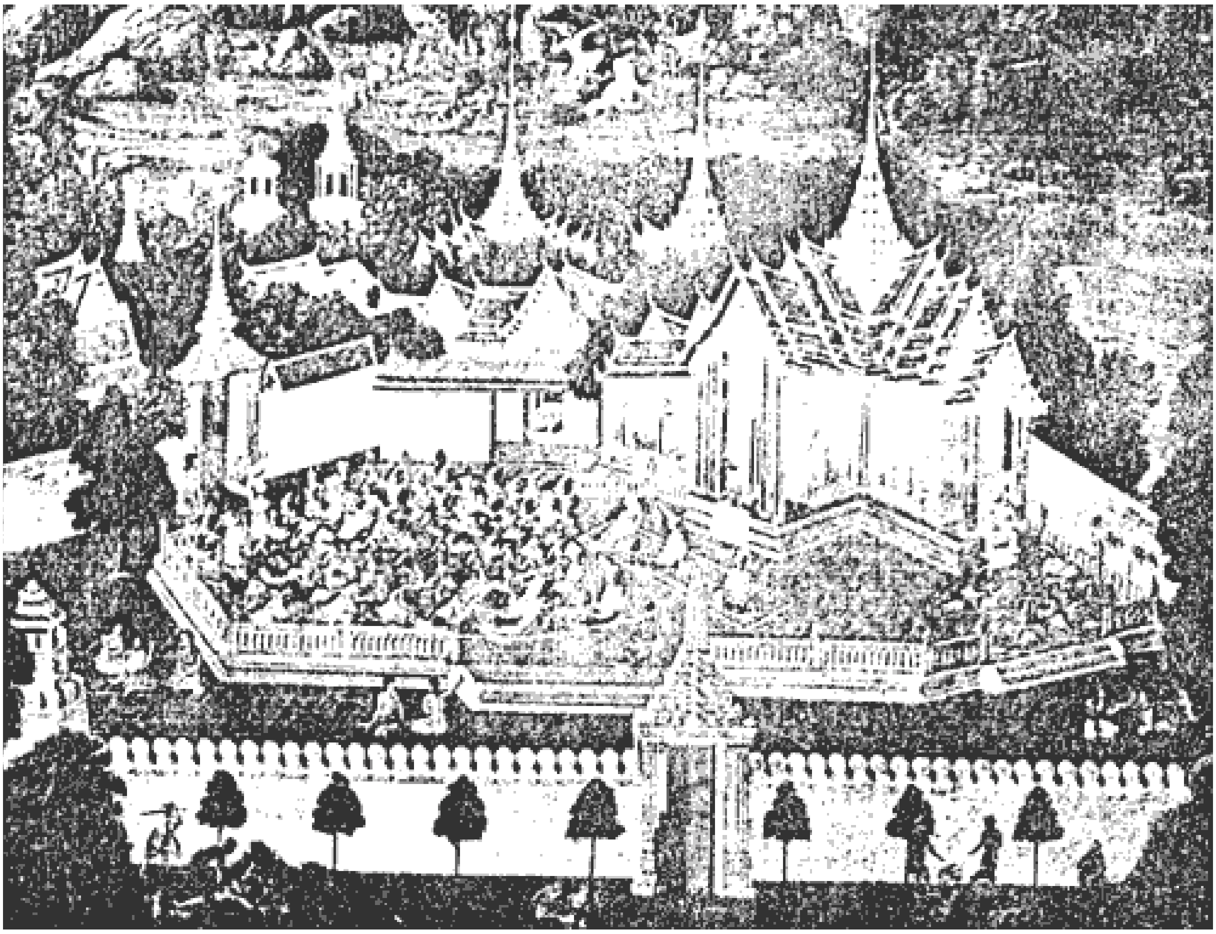


The Long Story of Ramayana: The Mural painting on the gallery of the Emerald Buddha Temple, Bangkok Period **Fig. 45a**

A careful study of these murals reveals the fact that at the time of repairs all former wall surface had been

hammered out and new plaster surface put in, so that all the murals are consequently new repaints. These entirely new murals bear no evidence that the artists concerned had adhered to the techniques as the play of light and shadow, shading of lines and western perspective were put into the picture. But this imitation of western practice was technically crude and imperfect, so that the resulting murals become poor examples of our traditional art, which is most regrettable. It may indicate that it is the decline of the artistic technical painting of Bangkok Mural painting.

**Fig. 45b**



The Long Story of Ramayana: The Mural painting on the gallery of the Emerald Buddha Temple, Bangkok Period

# Conclusion

Before we give a general impression of our subject (of Buddhist art of Thailand) we would like to raise a few points about Buddhism and Indian Culture. Buddhism was born in India. From the moment we start to talk about Buddhism and the Buddhist art of Thailand we must immediately look to India. Whenever we consider any cultural aspect of Thai life — particularly religious, social, educational, literary or artistic — our attention goes to that great country of India.

Nobody would deny that India is one of the cradles of world civilisation because of her outstanding contributions in diverse fields. In the history of human thought and culture, India has played an important part and her contributions are second to none. It is the birthplace of important religions of the world such as Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism, which influenced the culture and civilisation of the many parts of the world that accepted India as their "motherland". They are indebted to India in many respects.

Indians who came to settle in different countries of South-East Asia and the Far-East had their first contacts with the primitive tribes of those regions. By virtue of their superior military campaigns, cultural heritage and advanced civilisation, they gradually occupied the regions and converted them into their colonies. The Indians spread their own culture and tra-

ditions in all of these territories, and this marked the great beginning of the progressive stage of their cultural expansion.

Once Buddhism had a strong footing in Thailand, Buddhist art was strongly influenced and greatly stimulated by the creative genius of many people with whom it came in contact, and this led to great complexity and diversity. It never possessed an underlying unity. This unity is illustrated by the fact that the problems it was to solve, and the forms it developed have a certain constancy and continuity.

In the field of Buddhist art we have religious buildings, edifices for ritualistic purposes and for monastic life and the creation of impressive images to convey the idea of the Buddha. Bodhisattvas, monks and other sacred personages and the treasury of stories and legends together with their abundance of narrative motifs, set up a vocabulary of symbols to convey the main religious idea. The art of Buddhism devised convincing visual images of the world's metaphysical structure, especially the structure of the spheres lying beyond the limits of the empirical, terrestrial world.

In Buddhist art, the artistic treatment of the human body is performed in such a way that it conveys certain religious ideas — that of the Buddha and also certain other principles, of arrangement and construction in architecture as well as in pictorial compositions capable of representing the Buddhist view of the terrestrial

and supernatural world, which at the same time gives a spiritual quality.

Buddhist art in Thailand was a composite art. The various influences of the art forms of different nations were imbibed by the Thai artists into their own artistic work. The Thai artists introduced new elements of art side by side with the adoptation of the old style, which makes Thai art one of the most interesting Buddhist arts of south-East Asia or of Eastern art generally.

The original prototype of Buddhist art in Thailand was no doubt Indian art, but when the Thais came into contact with other nations on the Indo-Chinese peninsula of South-East Asia, they adopted the concepts and elements of the cultural and artistic activities of those countries. The Mons of Dvaravati, the Malays or Indonesians of Sri-Vijaya as well as the Khmers of the Lopburi period contributed much towards the development of Thai art, but while the process of borrowing was going on, the Thai artists introduced new elements, which were ultimately responsible for the birth of many schools of Thai arts in this land, having an independent style of their own which is best seen in the well known arts of Sukhothai, U-Tong, Ayudhya and Bangkok periods.

India and Thailand have had a connection since long ago. At the present moment many prehistoric excavations have been carried out in South-East Asia and the result seems to prove that the people there had

techological abilities, such as in growing rice and bronze metallurgy since the most ancient times, and not just recently as was previously believed. This probably leaves no doubt that during that period the relationship between the Indians and the South-East Asians was on an equal basis. Exchange of ideas and technology would have gone on between the two areas with sharing of the benefits on both sides.

During the historical period, Buddhism and Hinduism gave an impetus to South-East Asian people. These two great religions, which originated in India, modified their thought as well as giving them forces to develop their culture and their own way of life. Through this process it is really quite difficult to separate both religions from each other in South-East Asia. We owe the base of our culture to India but at the same time many of our indigenous elements have been mixed with this foundation. In Thailand, where Buddhism has always been the most venerated religion, Hindu priests are still retained to perform important ceremonies such as celebrating the birth of a royal child, the coronation and the anniversary of the regnal day of the king.

So, it can be concluded that Indian art served as the prototype of art in Thailand. Thai art, in the course of the centuries, developed its independent character and style, combining local artistic talents and inspiration. Thai art forms one of the glorious chapters in the history of Thailand. The Thai people still remember with

gratitude the unique contributions of India to their culture and civilization. The Thai artists never lost the individuality and sense of national integrity in their works of art, clearly indicating the real independent character and artistic workmanship of the Thai people all through the ages.

Now, there are some problems regarding the preservation of the ancient ruins of Thailand and of their future. The heritage of ancient property continuously preserved by Thai ancestors as valuable heirlooms to the later generations has become valuable property to all Thai people because of its importance in tracing the Thai history of the Thai nation, and throwing light on the past to show that Thais have progressed much in technical knowledge. The ancient ruins and monuments have come to be under the protection and control of the Department of Fine Arts and repair works have been undertaken from time to time. Laws have even been issued for the protection of antiquities. If any new discovery is made, the authorities will immediately register it under the protection and care of the Dept. of Fine Arts. But as there are a number of ancient places all over Thailand it becomes a difficult task for the Department to take care of them thoroughly, especially in a faraway district. At the same time the financial budget and number of people of the authority for protecting and renovating the ancient ruins are limited. Therefore, resources are not sufficient for the number of the ancient

monuments and antiquities which need to be protected and controlled. It is regrettable that many ancient places are going to fall into disrepair as time goes by.

Also, there are many thieves awaiting their chance to unearth the ancient places and steal valuable articles enshrined in the stupas. There are a number of robbers of such antiques as the heads of Buddha Images and Buddha Images from different temples and monasteries. This poses a great danger to the antiques, necessitating their removal or transfer from their original sites into the hands of antique collectors who seek their own advantage. These antiques —Buddha Images, heads of the Buddha, decorative artifacts and articles of ancient architecture, etc. —are later sent abroad into the hands of the foreign collectors.

In a few temples and monasteries, some Abbots make it their aim to develop their temples without any of the profound sense of beauty or value of the ancient ruins that are located in their temples. They order the ruins to be demolished and construct new buildings on the old location. As a result, this causes the ancient ruins to disappear before they can come to the knowledge of the Dept. of Fine Arts authority.

The matter to be concerned about is the future of antiquities conservation. Western civilization is changing Thailand continuously, influencing the young generation, who are not being inculcated with the idea of conserving the antiques and old Thai customs and tra-

ditions. Perhaps these valuable properties will be lost as a result.

Under the government, in the period of the ex-Prime Minister Marshall, I. Piboonsanggrahm, Thailand had a cultural revolution. The Prime Minister ordered demolished some old Thai traditions. There was an acceptance of Western civilization, for example, wearing shoes with socks, wearing suits, not wearing Jongkrabain (threading the rolled wearing cloth between the legs and bringing it up to rise at the back), prohibiting the chewing of betel-nut, etc.; at the same time he ordered the restoration of ancient monuments all over Thailand. Even though this was of some benefit to the remaining ancient sites, the restoration workers lacked technical skills and a profound knowledge of the arts, having little regard or respect for the ancient ruins. As a result, much damage was caused to the original structures regarding their aesthetic appearance.

His Majesty the present King Rama IX of Chakri Dynasty felt concerned as he sincerely respected the ancient Thai ruins and was always interested in inspecting them himself. He visited the ancient places in different parts of Thailand; Ayudhya, Sukhothai, Chaengsaen province, etc. Expressing his concern about the future of the ancient ruins he commented that "the broken bricks and the remaining debris of the past are the foundation of the present and will succeed

to promote the glorious future". This made his people feel much appreciation for his kindness and concern for the nation in all its respects. The king is the exemplar who keeps and protects the old customs and traditions in the present, also he is the Royal patron of Buddhism in Thailand.

While the antiques and the ancient ruins are going to deteriorate, either directly by the effect of time or indirectly being damaged by those not respecting the ancient places for their own sake, there should be some rules for the protection of the ancient sites, such as the issuing of strict laws with punishment to those who destroy the archaeological property of the nation and passing the laws and giving notice to those who have archeological articles in their possession to surender them to the Dept. of Fine Arts. Public education is required so that people are aware of their responsibility to the national properties. Fundamentally, the subjects of archaeology, history and the fine arts should be made available in the curriculum for pupils to learn at a young age and to exhort them to love and protect the archeological heritage of their nation.

Some rules are important tools in motivating the public to take part in their responsibility for the valuable heritage from our ancestors. These ancient artworks give an indication of the prosperity and technical advances over historical time. By maintaining this heritage we will benefit future generations.

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